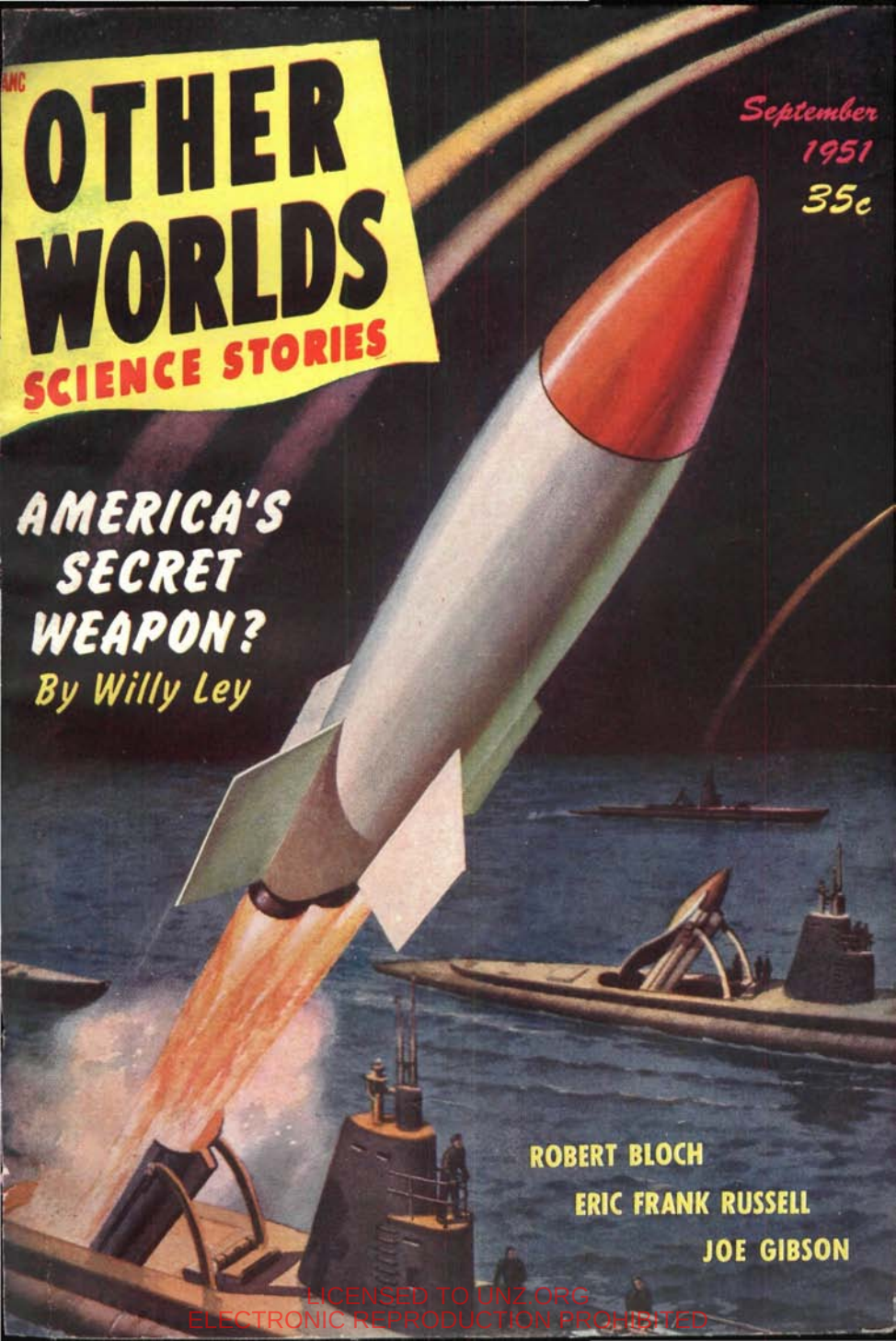

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WILLY LEY — ROCKET EXPERT

WILLY Ley was born in Berlin, Germany, on October 2, 1906. To the best of his knowledge there were no writers, scientists or artists in his family. The closest any relative came to artistic livelihood was an uncle who was a band leader in the German Army. As a child he was always slightly irked that adults, especially teachers, when learning his birthday, would say: "Ah, on Hindenburg's birthday," when it was also the birthday of Marshal Foch, Mahatma Ghandi and the painter Hans Thoma —which should be confusing to astrologers.

He attended public school and high school in Berlin. He studied at the universities of Berlin and of Koenigsberg in East Prussia — mostly paleontology, astronomy and physics. Even during his early high school days he was fascinated at least as much by the history behind a scientific fact as by the fact itself. His original plan had been to become a geologist, but in 1925 he became acquainted with the fundamental theoretical work on rockets and space travel by Prof. Hermann Oberth and in 1927 he became one of the founding members of the German Rocket Society. Ever since, as he put it "The profession has been alternately the hobby or the hobby the profession, depending on circumstances."

He saw the German Rocket Society, which was largely his work, dis-

(*Continued on inside back cover*)

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EDITORIAL

OUR good friend, Howard Browne, editor of *Amazing Stories* recently ran an editorial in which he lashed out at the boys who have been trying to make science fiction "adult" in appeal. In short, he said the business of science fiction being for the purpose of uplifting and enlightening mankind, and pointing the way toward his future good behavior and his high and mighty destiny, was pure and simple barnyard manure.

Well, is it? Here's *our* opinion. We've always felt that science-fiction *does* point the way toward the future. It *does* say "here's how it can be" and it also says "here's how it *will* be." Science fiction is prophecy with a vengeance. It has those old fogies like Nostradamus and Mother Shipton (who had to talk in riddles) faded way back into the balcony. But there is where the "mission" of science fiction stops.

We agree that science fiction has no great mission at all. It is, simply, for entertainment, for exercise of the imagination, and for expression of literary talent, that is, the talent of the story-teller. When we speak of "literary" we don't mean the high-flown meaning of the word as it is used in the long-hair ivory-tower circle of writers (who, if you ask us, are writers who can't write, and who therefore talk about writing). Literacy, to us, is the ability to use words—and words, naturally, should be used to tell something. In our case, it is stories they tell. Science fiction stories. Illiteracy, to us, means the "literate" type of writer, who uses words meaninglessly. Illiteracy is not just the inability t use words, but the deliberate mis use of them. And there are plent of ignoramuses misusing them.

Which is where we come in. OTH ER WORLDS tries to use the word to tell stories, to entertain, to giv the story-teller, with all his glamou and excitement, a chance to pleas his listeners, or in this case, hi readers.

In the old days when Homer wa spinning his Oddessy and Illiad an in even older days, when the story teller of the tribe gathered his tribes people around the tribal fire an related the adventures of the gods the same words were being used th same way we are using them today i OTHER WORLDS. Yes, the ol story-tellers had a moral; they in corporated a lesson into their fables —and today we *do* have the sam thing in science fiction. We manag to point to better things, point up moral, and point toward progre and achievement not yet achieved But we aren't, as Howard says, "des tined to lead the world out of it morass into its utopia." We're her to make you laugh, make you cry make you yell with excitement, o shudder with horror, or chill witl danger. We're here to give you emotions fre play—not your mind We aren't out to "educate" you, t "make something" out of you. W don't presume to be little tin god If anybody has the attributes of go hood, it is the reader. His ever wish is our command—and for twen ty-five years we've listened to thos wishes being expressed. Not once hav we found a reader who thought h

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had to be guided in his thinking, and that that's what he wanted out of science fiction. So, no matter what "word" comes out of the ivory tower, we're ignoring it. This is a world of realism, not high-flying gossamer. And we take science fiction as a reality. It is story-telling as it is done in the modern manner—and no more!

Bravo, Howard. We're with you. Our feet are on the ground, not in the air. Imagination without solid foundation is worthless. And "adult" science fiction, when the word means "lording it over the average guy", just doesn't stand a chance with us.

Actually, we think OTHER WORLDS is the most adult magazine in the field. It caters to human beings who do their *own* thinking. Anyone who has to have his thinking done for him ISN'T ADULT. And try to "get around" *that*. Dust off your brains you highbrows — you ain't so high!

With this issue of OTHER WORLDS, a great change is going to become apparent. We might point to Joe Gibson's novel as an example, except that there doesn't exactly express it. It's a good story, yes, but it isn't anything new in "our lack of policy" as we like to express it. Our "lack" of policy is a byword with science fiction readers and writers. We get praised for it a lot. People like us because we aren't in a rut. Anything goes with us—just so it's *good*. If a Tibetan monk proves he's a better s-f editor than we are, you can bet he'll be editing the magazine in jig-time. Or if a dozen monkeys with typewriters prove they can write better s-f than our writers (say, maybe we got something there, judging from some of the tripe we read in our mail), then by golly, they will be supplied with typewriters.

get to read the stories.

Our future issues are going to be like that. Every "taboo" in the magazine field is going to be broken. Flagrantly. For instance, if we find an s-f story 269,000 words long, and it's good, you are going to get to read it if we have to publish it in 38 installments! If we have only *one* title on the contents page because of it, we'll fill the rest of the space with a poem if need be. Who ever saw an s-f reader who bought a magazine because he *counted* the titles on the contents page? What idiots do publishers think readers are? On that reasoning 100 titles would be the leading seller in the field. And 100 short-shorts of 600 words each would be the desire of the reader.

From now on, a short story will have to be TERRIFIC to get into our pages. Take warning, you word-slingers, the day of the totem-pole editor is over. THIS is what we went into the publishing business for. This is why we quit as editor of *Amazing Stories*. In twenty-five years we've learned what the readers want—and up to now (barring our accident which held us up in this new adventure) we've been doing "as the Romans do". We're going to switch that old saying: now it's "When we're in Rome, the Romans had jolly well better do as WE do!"

So, if next issue there isn't a contents page at all, you'll know it's because there isn't a complete story in the issue—but by heck, you'll sure enjoy what you find. It'll be standing on it's own feet, not atop a totem-pole of habit and custom and middle-of-the-road play-it-safers.

And if you think we're kidding, watch the next year's issues. They'll be a three-ring circus of surprises.

Ram

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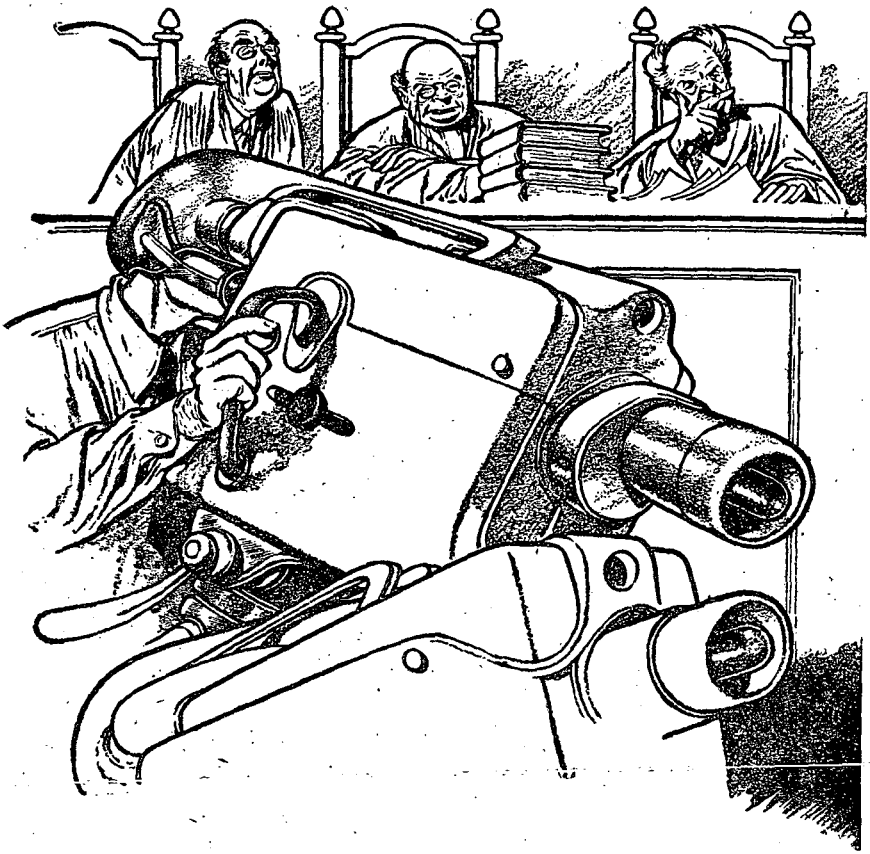

THE WITNESS

By Eric Frank Russell

The eyes of the world were focused on the courtroom where the monster from space was on trial. The Prosecutor had an air-tight case built on the testimony of sixteen witnesses, while the Defense—well, they did manage to find one witness !

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NO court in history had drawn so much world attention. Six television cameras swivelled slowly as they followed red and black-robed legal lights parading solemnly to their seats. Ten microphones sent the creaking of shoes and rustling of papers over national networks in both hemispheres. Two hundred reporters and special cor-

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respondents filled a gallery reserved for them alone. Forty representatives of cultural organizations stared across the court at twice their number of governmental and diplomatic officials sitting blank-faced and impassive.

Tradition had gone by the board; procedure resembled nothing familiar to the average lawyer, for this was a special occasion devised to suit a special case. Technique had been adapted to cope with a new and extraordinary culprit, while the dignity of justice was upheld by means of stagy trimmings.

There were five judges and no jury, but a billion citizens were in their homes watching and listening, determined to ensure fair play. Ideas of what constituted fair play were as varied as the unseen audience, and most of them unreasoning, purely emotional. A minority of spectators hoped for life, many lusted for death, while the waverers compromised in favor of arbitrary expulsion, each according to how he had been influenced by the vast flood of colorful and bigoted propaganda preceding this event.

The judges took their places with the casual unconcern of those too old and deeply sunk in wisdom to notice the limelight. A hush fell, broken only by the ticking of the large clock over their rostrum. It was the hour of ten in the morning of May 17, 1977. The microphones sent the ticking around the world. The cameras showed the judges, the clock, and finally settled on th center of all this attention: the crea ture in the defendant's box.

Six months ago this latter objec had been the sensation of the cen tury, the focal point of a few wil hopes and many wilder fears. Sinc then it had appeared so often o video screens, magazine and news paper pages, that the public sens of amazement had departed, whil the hopes and fears remained. I had slowly degenerated to a cartoo character contemptuously dubbe 'Spike', depicted as halfway be tween a hopelessly malformed imbe cile and the crafty emissary of a craftier other-world enemy. Famil iarity had bred contempt, but not enough of it to kill the fears.

Its name was Maeth and it came from some planet in the region o Procyon. Three feet high, bright green, with feet that were mere pads, and stubby limbs fitted with suckers and cilia, it was covered in spiky protrusions and looked somewhat like an educated cactus. Except for its eyes, great golden eyes that looked upon men in naive expectation of mercy, because it had never done anyone any harm. A toad, a wistful toad, with jewels in its head.

Pompously, a black gowned official announced, "This special court, held by international agreement, and convened within the area of jurisdiction of the Federal Government of the United States of Amerca, is now in session! Silence!"

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The middle judge glanced at his ellows, adjusted his spectacles, ›eered gravely at the toad, or cactus, or whatever it might be. "Maeth of Procyon, we are given to understand that you can neither hear nor peak, but can comprehend us telpathically and respond visually."

Cameras focussed as Maeth turned to the blackboard immediately behind him and chalked one word. 'Yes."

"You are accused," the judge went on, "generally of illegal entry nto this world known as Earth and specifically into the United States of America. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"How else can one enter?" inquired Maeth, in bold white letters.

The judge frowned. "Kindly answer my question."

"Not guilty."

"You have been provided with defending counsel - have you any objection to him?"

"Blessed be the peacemaker."

Few relished that crack. It smacked of the Devil quoting Scripture.

MAKING a sign, the judge leaned back, polished his glasses. Adjusting the robes on his shoulders, the prosecuting attorney came to his feet. He was tall, hatchet-faced, sharp-eyed.

"First witness!"

A thin, reedy man came out the well of the court, took his chair, sat

"Name?"

"Samuel Nall."

"You farm outside Danville?"

"Yes, sir. I—."

"Do not call me 'sir.' Just reply to my questions. It was upon your farm that this creature made its landing?"

"Your Honors, I object!" Mr. Defender stood up, a fat, florid man, but deceptively nimble-witted. "My client is a person, not a creature. It should therefore be referred to as the defendant."

"Objection overruled," snapped the middle judge. "Proceed, Mr. Prosecutor."

"It was upon your farm that this *creature* landed?"

"Yes," said Samuel Nall, staring pridefully at the cameras. "It come down all of a sudden and—."

"Confine yourself to the question. The arrival was accompanied by much destruction?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Two barns and a dollop of crops. I'm down three thousand dollars."

"Did this *creature* show any remorse?"

"None." Nall scowled across the court. "Acted like it couldn't care less."

Mr. Prosecutor seated himself, throwing a mock smile at the fat man. "Your witness."

Standing up, the latter eyed Nall benevolently and inquired, "Were these barns of yours octagonal tow- movable

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louvres and with barometrically-controlled roofs?"

Samuel Nall waggled his eyebrows and uttered a faint, "Huh?"

"Never mind. Dismiss that query and answer me this one: were your crops composed of foozles and bicolored merkins?"

In desperation, Nall said, "It was ripe barley."

"Dear me! Barley—how strange! Don't you know what foozles and merkins are? Wouldn't you recognize them if you saw them?"

"I reckon not," admitted Farmer Nall, with much reluctance.

"Permit me to observe that you seem singularly lacking in perceptive faculties," remarked Mr. Defender, tartly. "Indeed, I am really sorry for you. an you detect sorrow in my face?"

"I dunno," said Nall, feeling that his throne before the cameras was becoming somehow like a bed of nails.

"In other words, you cannot recognize remorse when you see it?"

"Objection!" roared Mr. Prosecutor, coming up crimson. "The witness cannot reasonably be expected —." He stopped as his opponent sat down. Recovering swiftly, he growled, "Next witness!"

NUMBER two was big, beefy, clad in blue, and had all the assurance of one long familiar with courts and the tedious processes of the law.

"Name?"

"Joseph Higginson."

"You are an officer of the Dansville police?"

"Correct."

"You were summoned by the first witness?"

"I was."

Mr. Prosecutor wore the smile of one in complete command of circumstances as he went on, "Discovering what had occurred, you tried to apprehend the cause of it, did you not?"

"I sure did." Officer Higginson turned his head, threw a scowl at the golden eyes pleading in the box.

"And what happened?"

"It paralyzed me with a look."

The judge on the left interjected, "You appear to have recovered. How extensive was this paralysis, and how long did it last?"

"It was complete, Your Honor, but it wore off after a couple of hours."

"By which time," said Mr. Prosecutor, taking over again, "this outlandish object had made good its escape?"

Lugubriously, "Yes."

"It therefore obstructed a police officer in the execution of his duty, assaulted a police officer, and resisted arrest?"

"It did," agreed Higginson, with emphasis.

"Your witness." Mr. Prosecutor seated himself, well satisfied.

Mr. Defender arose, hooked thumbs in vest-holes, and inquired

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can recognise another police official when you see him?"

"Naturally."

"Very well. There is one at present seated in the public section. Kindly point him out for the benefit of this court."

Higginson looked carefully over the small audience which represented in person the vaster audience beyond. Cameras swung in imitation of his search. Judges, reporters, officials, all looked the same way.

"He must be in plain clothes," declared Higginson, giving up.

The middle judge interposed mildly, "This court can hardly accept witness's inability to recognize a plain clothes officer as evidence."

"No, Your Honor," agreed Mr. Defender. His plump features registered frustration and disappointment which gladdened the heart of his watching opponent. Then, satisfied that the other had reached the heights, he plunged him to the depths by brightening and adding, "But the said official is in full uniform."

Mr. Prosecutor changed faces like swapping masks. Higginson got a crick in the neck as he took in the audience again.

"Olive-drab with red trimmings," Mr. Defender went on. "He is a Provost Marshal of the Corps of Military Police."

"You didn't tell me that," Higginson pointed out. He was openly

"Did you tell the defendant that you were a police officer?"

The witness reddened, opened his mouth, closed it, gazed appealingly at the prosecuting attorney.

"Answer the question!" insisted a judge.

"No, I did not tell it."

"Why not?"

Mopping his forehead, Higginson said in hoarse tones, "Didn't think it was necessary. It was obvious, wasn't it?"

"It is for me to put the questions; for you to provide the answers. Do you agree that the Provost Marshal is obvious?"

"Objection!" Mr. Prosecutor waved for attention. "Opinions are not evidence."

"Sustained!" responded the middle judge. He eyed defending attorney over his glasses. "This court takes cognisance of the fact that there was no need for witness to offer vocally any information available to defendant telepathically. Proceed with your examination."

Mr. Defender returned his attention to Higginson and asked "Precisely what were you doing at the moment you were paralysed?"

"Aiming my gun."

"And about to fire?"

"Yes."

"At the defendant?"

"Yes."

"Is it your habit to fire first and ask questions afterward?"

"The witness's habits are not relevant," said the middle judge.

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He looked at Higginson. "You may ignore that question."

Officer Higginson grinned his satisfaction and duly ignored it.

"From what range were you about to fire?" pursued defending attorney.

"Fifty or sixty yards."

"So far? You are an excellent marksman?"

Higginson nodded, without pride, and warily. The plump man, he had decided, was a distinct pain in the neck.

"About what time do you hope to get home for supper?"

Caught on one foot by this sudden shift of attack, the witness gaped and said, "Maybe midnight."

"Your wife will be happy to know that. Were it not for the radio and video, you could not have told her vocally, could you?"

"I can't bawl from here to Dansville," assured Higginson, slightly sarcastic.

"Of course not. Such a distance is completely beyond range of the unaided human voice." Mr. Defender rubbed his chin, mused awhile, suddenly demanded, "Can you bawl *telepathically* for fifty to sixty yards?"

No reply.

"Or is your mental limit in keeping with what the defendant assures me to be the normal limit of twenty-five to thirty yards?"

Higginson screwed up his eyes and said nothing.

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"A pity!" commented Mr. Defender, shaking his head sadly and taking a seat.

THE third witness was a swarthy, olive-skinned character who stared sullenly at his boots while the prosecuting attorney got to work.

"Name?"

"Dominic Lolordo." He gave it in an undertone, as if reluctant to have it coupled with his image on the video.

"You operate a sea-food restaurant?"

"Yes."

"Do you recognize the creature in that box?"

His eyes slid sidewise. "Yes."

"In what circumstances did you last see it?"

"In my joint, after hours."

"It had forced an entrance, had it not, shortly before dawn, and it awakened you while plundering the place?"

"That's correct."

"You did not try to catch it?"

Lolordo made a face. "Catch that? *Look* at it!"

"Appearance alone would not deter you if you were being robbed," Mr. Prosecutor suggested meaningly. "Surely there was something else?"

"It had walked in through the window," said Lolordo, his voice rising considerably. "Right through the window, busting a hole its own

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shape. It went out the same way, making another hole. No broken glass around, no splinters, nothing. What can you do with a green nightmare that walks through glass as if it wasn't there?"

"Seeing this demonstration of supernormal powers, you ran for assistance?"

"You bet!"

"But it came too late? This unscrupulous plunderer had gone?"

"Yes."

The questioner handed over with a gesture, and defending attorney began.

"You assert that you were plundered? Of what?"

"Stuff."

"That is not an answer."

"Ain't it?" Lolordo yawned with exaggerated disinterest.

The middle judge bent forward, frowning heavily. "Does the witness desire to be committed for contempt?"

"Lobsters and oysters." said Lolordo, hurriedly and with bad grace.

"In other words, a square meal?" inquired Mr. Defender.

"If that's what you want to call it."

"Was it being consumed as if the defendant were ravenously hungry?"

"I didn't stick around to see. I took one look and went on my way —fast."

"So that if defendant picked up enough of your thoughts to realise that a felonious act had been committed, there was no opportunity to apologise or make restitution?"

No reply.

"And, in any case, your departing thoughts were violently hostile?"

"I wasn't hot-footing for a bouquet," assured Lolordo.

Mr. Defender said to the judges, "This witness is impertinent. I have no further use for him."

The judges conferred, and the middle one decided coldly, "The witness will be detained within the precincts of this court until the case has been decided."

Lolordo stamped away from his seat, glowering right and left.

"FOURTH witness!"

The chair was taken by a middle-aged, dapper man who resembled the movie notion of a bank president or an eminent surgeon. He could have been cast equally well for either part.

"Name?"

"Winthrop Allain."

"You are a resident professor of zoology, are you not?" inquired the prosecuting attorney.

"That is correct."

"You recognise the creature in the box?"

"I ought to. I have been in close communication with it for many weeks."

Mr. Prosecutor made an impatient gesture. "In what circumstances did you first encounter it?"

An answer to that one seemed unnecessary. The whole world knew

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the circumstances, had been told them time and time again with many fanciful frills.

Nevertheless, Allain responded, "It appeared in the Zoo some two hours after closing time. How it got there I don't know."

"It was snooping around, seeing all there was to see, making mental note of everything?"

Hesitantly, "Well—."

"Was it or was it not looking over the place?"

"It certainly saw a good bit of the zoo before the keepers discovered it, but—."

"Please do not embellish your answers, Professor Allain," said Mr. Prosecutor, firmly. "Let us continue: owing to the great furore created by this strange object's arrival and subsequent exploits, your keepers had no difficulty in recognising it?"

"None at all. They reported to me at once."

"What did you do then?"

"I attended to the matter myself. I found it a warm and comfortable apartment in the unused section of the Reptile House."

The entire court along with the cameras peered respectfully at the ex pert who could treat such an occasion with such nonchalance.

"How did you achieve that without suffering paralysis, disintegration or some other unnatural fate?" Mr. Prosecutor's voice had a touch of acid. "Did you graciously extend a cordial invitation?"

The witness, dryly, "Precisely!"

"There is a time and place for humor, Professor," reproved Mr. Prosecutor, with some severity. "However, the court understands that you classified this nightmarish entity as a reptile and managed to put it in its proper place."

"Nonsense! The Reptile House was immediately available, convenient and acceptable. The defendant is unclassifiable."

Dismissing that with a contemptuous gesture, the prosecuting attorney went on, "You are not prepared to tell this court by what means you overcame this creature's menacing powers and succeeded in trapping it?"

"I did not trap it. I knew it was sentient and treated it as such."

"If we can rely upon the evidence of other witnesses," said Mr. Prosecutor, tartly, "you were fortunate to have any choice about the matter. Why did this caricature permit you to make the contact it denied to others?"

"Because it recognised my mind as of a type accustomed to dealing with non-human forms. With considerable logic it assumed that contact with me would be far easier than with any others."

"With considerable logic," echoed prosecuting attorney, turning toward the judges. "I ask Your Honors to make especial note of that remark, bearing in mind that witness has a distinguished status." He returned his attention to Allain.

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"By that, you mean it is intelligent?"

"Indubitably!"

"You have had many weeks in which to study the mind of this unwanted invader. Just how intelligent would you say it is?"

"As much so as we are, though in a different way."

"Do you consider this sample to be fairly representative of its race?"

"I have no reason to suppose otherwise."

"Which race, therefore, equals us in brain-power?"

"Very probably." Professor Allain rubbed his chin and mused a moment. "Yes, insofar as one can relate things which are not the same, I'd say they are our intellectual equals."

"Perhaps our superiors, not only in brains, but also in numbers?"

"I don't know. I doubt it."

"The possibility cannot be ruled out?" persisted Mr. Prosecutor.

"Such data as is available is far from sufficient and therefore I—."

"Do not evade my question. There is a possibility, no matter how remote, that the life-form represented by this monster now standing before us is the direst menace humanity has ever been called upon to face?"

"Anything can be construed as a menace if you insist, but—."

"*A menace*, yes or no?"

The middle judge interjected profoundly, "Witness cannot be re- [illegible] positive an- swer to a hypothetical question."

Not fazed in the least, Mr. Prosecutor bowed. "Very well, Your Honor, I will put it differently." He resumed with Allain. "In your expert estimation, is the intelligence quotient of this life-form high enough to enable it to conquer, subdue and enslave humanity if it so desired?"

"I do not know."

"That is your only answer?"

"I'm afraid so."

"It is quite satisfactory," commented Mr. Prosecutor, throwing a significant look through the cameras at the unseen but billion-strong jury, "inasmuch as it admits the possibility of peril, extreme peril."

"I did not say that," protested Allain.

"Neither have you said the contrary," retorted the other. He seated himself, confident and pleased. "Your witness."

Mr. Defender began heavily, "Professor Allain, have your various hand-outs concerning the defendant been reported factually?"

"Without exception, they have been grossly distorted," said Allain, grimly. He cast a cold look at the big group of reporters who grinned back arrogantly.

"Defendant has repeatedly been described as a spy who must receive drastic treatment lest worse befall. Does your data support that theory?"

"No."

"What status do you assign to the

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defendant?"

"A refugee," said Allain.

"It is impossible for the defendant's motives to be hostile?"

"Nothing is impossible," said Professor Allain, honest though the heavens fall. "The smartest of us can be fooled. But I don't think I am fooled. That is my opinion, for what it is worth."

Mr. Defender sighed, "As I have been reminded, opinions are not evidence." He sat down murmuring, "Most unfortunate! Most unfortunate!"

"FIFTH witness!"

"Tenth witness!"

"Sixteenth witness!"

That one, number sixteen, ended the prosecution's roster. Four or five times as many witnesses could have been produced, but these were the pick of the bunch. They had something cogent to offer, something calculated to help the public to decide once and for all—at least with its prejudices if not with its brains—whether gallivanting life-forms were to be tolerated or given the bum's rush, or worse. The question at issue was the ephemeral one of public safety, and it was for the public to say whether or not they were going to take any risks. With this in mind, the evidence of the sixteen made a formidable indictment against the queer, golden-eyed thing on trial for its liberty or even its life.

Conscious that he was leading [illegible] points, Mr. Prosecutor came erect, gazed authoritatively at the defendant.

"Just why did you come to this world?"

"To escape my own."

"Do you expect us to believe that?"

"I expect nothing," chalked Maeth laboriously. "I merely hope."

"You hope for what?"

"For kindness."

It disconcerted the questioner. Left with no room for a telling retort, he was silent a moment while he sought another angle.

"Then your own world did not please you? What was wrong with it?"

"Everything," responded Maeth.

"Meaning you were a misfit?"

"Yes."

"Nevertheless you view *this* world as a suitable dumping-ground for misfits?"

No reply.

"I suggest that your plea is nonsense, your whole story a sheer fabrication. I suggest that your motives in coming here are deeper and darker than you dare admit. I will go further and put it to you that you do not come even from the region of Procyon, but from somewhere a good deal nearer, such as Mars."

Still no reply.

"Are you aware that astronautical engineers have subjected your damaged ship to long and careful exam[illegible]"

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Maeth stood there, pathetically patient, eyes looking into the distance as if in search of peace, and said nothing.

"Are you aware that they have reported that while your vessel is far in advance of anything yet developed by us, and while it is undoubtedly capable of travelling far outside this solar system, it is not able to reach Alpha Centauri, much less Procyon?"

"That is true," wrote Maeth on the board.

"Yet you maintain that you came from the region of Procyon?"

"Yes."

The prosecuting attorney spread despairing hands. "You have heard defendant, Your Honors. His ship cannot reach here from Procyon. All the same, it came from Procyon. This creature cannot manage to be consistent, either because it is dim-witted or, more probably, an ineffectual liar. I therefore see little purpose in continuing my—."

"I rode on a rock," scrawled Maeth.

"There!" Mr. Prosecutor pointed sardonically at the blackboard. "Defendant rode on a rock. That is the escape from a self-created impasse—a rock, no less!" He frowned at the box. "You must have ridden a long, long way."

"I did."

"So you sat your ship on this rock and saved fuel by letting it carry you many millions of miles? Have you any idea of the mathematical odds against finding a wandering asteroid in any section of space?"

"They are very large," admitted Maeth.

"Yet you discovered the very asteroid to bring you all the way here? Most astonishing spacemanship, is it not?"

"It did not bring me all the way. It brought me most of the way."

"All right," agreed Mr. Prosecutor, with airy contempt. "Ninety-nine millions instead of one hundred millions or whatever the distance is supposed to be. It is still amazing."

"Moreover," continued Maeth, writing steadily, "I did not select one to bring me here, as you imply. I thankfully used the only visible rock to take me anywhere. I had no specific destination. I fled into the void at random, putting my trust in the fates."

"So some other rock might have borne you some place else, might it not?"

"Or no place at all," Maeth put morbidly. "The fates were kind."

"Don't be too sure of that." Mr. Prosecutor hooked thumbs in vest pockets and studied the other with sinister expression. "If your real purposes, your real motives are in fact those which have been attributed to you by our ever-alert news-services, it is to be expected that you would have a cover-up story replete with plausibility. You have given this court such a story but

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have offered no concrete evidence in proof. We are left with nothing but your unsupported word — and the word of an ill-formed alien, an unknown quantity, at that!" He paused, ended, "Can you not submit to this court something more material than a series of bald assertations?"

"I have no way of combating disbelief," wrote Maeth, slowly and tiredly, "except with trust."

Mr. Prosecutor countered that one by striking hard and ruthlessly. "How many others of your kind are now upon this world, following their dastardly designs while you distract attention by posing in the full glare of publicity?"

The court, the hidden audience, had not thought of that. Half a dozen reporters quietly kicked themselves for not having conceived it first and played it up for all it was worth. It had been assumed from the beginning that the alien in their hands was the only one on the planet. Yet there might well be more, a dozen, a hundred, hiding in the less frequented places, skulking in the shadows, biding their time. People stared at each other and fidgeted uneasily.

"I came alone," Maeth put on the board.

"I accept that statement. It may be the only truthful one you have made. Experts report that your vessel is a single-seater scout, so obviously you came in it alone. But how many other vessels came about the same time?"

"None."

"It would be a comfort to think so," remarked Mr. Prosecutor, thereby discomforting his listeners. "Doubtless, your world has many other ships, much larger and more powerful than yours?"

"Many," admitted Maeth. "But they can go no farther or faster. They can only bear greater loads."

"How did you come by your own ship?"

"I stole it."

"Indeed?" The prosecuting attorney raised his eyebrows, gave a little laugh. "A self-confessed thief!" He assumed an air of broadminded understanding. "It is expected, of course, that one would suffer less by confessing to theft rather than espionage." He let that sink in before attempting another hard blow. "Would you care to tell us how many other bold and adventurous males are ready or making ready to follow your path to conquest?"

Defending attorney stood up and said, "I advise my client not to answer."

His opponent waved him down, turned to the judges. "Your Honors, I am ready to state my case."

They consulted the clock, talked in undertones between themselves, then said, "Proceed."

THE speech for the prosecution was able, devastating and long. It reviewed the evidence, drew dark conclusions, implied many things from which the hidden audience

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could draw other and still darker conclusions. This is not to say that Mr. Prosecutor had any real hatred of or fear of the stranger at the gate; it was merely that he was doing his specialised job with ability that was considerable.

"This case, with its own new and peculiar routine," he reminded, "will go down in legal annals. As from today it will constitute a precedent by which we shall determine our attitude toward future visitors from space. And the final arbiters of that attitude will be *you,* the members of the general public, who will reap the reward of outside alliances or"—he paused, hardened his voice—"suffer the sorrows of otherworld enmities. Allow me to emphasise that the rewards can be small, pitifully small — while the sorrows can be immense!"

Clearing his throat, he had a sip of water, started to get into his stride. "In trying to decide what should be done for the best we have no basis for forming conclusions other than that provided by the fantastic example who will be the subject of your verdict."

Turning, he stared at Maeth while he went on. "This creature has not been put on oath because we know of no oath binding upon it. Its ethics—if any—are its own, having little in common with ours. All we do know is that its far-fetched and highly imaginative story places such a strain upon human credulity that any one of us might be forgiven for deeming it a shameless liar."

Maeth's large eyes closed in pain, but Mr. Prosecutor went determinedly on. "While the question of its truthfulness or lack of same may remain a matter for speculation, we do have some evidence based upon fact. We know, for instance, that it has no respect for property or the law, which forms of respect are the very foundation-stones of the civilization we have builded through the centuries and intend to preserve against all comers."

He overdid it there. Maeth was too small, too wide-eyed and alone to fit the part of a ruthless destroyer of civilizations. Nevertheless, the picture would serve to sway opinions. Some thousands, probably millions, would argue that when in doubt it is best to play safe.

"A thief. More than that: a self-admitted thief who steals not only from us but also from his own," declared the prosecuting attorney, quite unconscious of switching his pronoun from neuter to male. "A destroyer, and an intelligent one, possibly the forerunner of a host of destroyers. I say that advisedly, for where one can go an army can follow." Dismissing the question of whence said army was going to get its flock of trans-cosmic asteroids, he added, "A dozen armies!"

His voice rising and falling, hardening and softening, he played ex-

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pertly upon the emotions of his listeners as a master would play on a giant organ, appealing to world patriotism, pandering to parochialism, justifying prejudices, enlarging fears—fear of self, fear of others, fear of the strange in shape, fear of tomorrow, fear of the unknown. Solemnity, ridicule, sonorousness, sarcasm, all were weapons in his vocal armory.

"He," Mr. Prosecutor said, pointing at Maeth and still using the male pronoun, "he pleads for admission as a citizen of this world. Do we take him with all his faults and follies, with all his supernormal powers and eccentric aptitudes, with all his hidden motives that may become clear only when it is too late? Or, if indeed he be as pure and innocent as he would have us believe, would it not be better to inflict upon him a grave injustice rather than court infinitely greater injustices to a great number?"

Challengingly he stared around. "If we take him, as a refugee, who will have him? Who will accept the society of a creature with which the average human has no joint understanding?" He gave a short, sharp laugh. "Oh, yes, there have been requests for the pleasure of his company. Incredible as it may seem, there are people who want him."

Holding up a letter for all to see, he continued, "This person offers him a home. Why? Well, the writer claims that he himself was a spiky thing in Procyon during his eighth incarnation." He tossed the letter on his desk. "The crackpots are always with us. Fortunately, the course of human history will be decided by calmly reasoning citizens and not by incurable nuts."

For a further half hour he carried on, a constant flow of words which concluded with, "In human affairs there is a swift end for the human spy, quick riddance for the suspected spy. I can conceive of no reason why any alien form deserves treatment more merciful than that which we accord to fellow humans. Here, we have before us one who at very least is an undesirable character, at most the first espionage agent of a formidable enemy. It is the prosecution's case that you have to consider *only* whether it is in the best interest of public safety that he be rewarded with death or with summary expulsion into the space from which he came. The weight of evidence rules out all other alternatives. You will not have failed to note that the witnesses who have appeared are overwhelmingly for the prosecution. Is it not remarkable that there is not one witness for the defense?" He waited to give it time to sink home, then drove it further by repeating, "Not one!"

Another sip of water, after which he seated himself, carefully smoothed the legs of his pants.

One thing seemed fairly clear:

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Maeth was a stinker.

MR. Defender created a mild stir right at the start by rising and saying, "Your Honors, the defense does not intend to state its case."

The judges peered at him as if he were a sight ten times more strange than his own client. They pawed papers, talked together in whispers.

In due time the middle one inquired, "By that, do you mean that you surrender to verdict by public poll?"

"Eventually, of course, Your Honor, but not just yet. I wish to produce evidence for my side and will be content to let my case rest on that."

"Proceed," ordered the judge, frowning doubtfully.

Addressing Maeth, the defending attorney said, "On your home world all are like you, namely, telepathic and non-vocal?"

"Yes, everyone."

"They share a common neural band, or, to put it more simply, they think with a communal mind?"

"Yes."

"That is the essential feature in which your home world differs from this one of ours: that its people share a racial mind, thinking common thoughts?"

"Yes," chalked Maeth.

"Tell this court about your parents."

Maeth's eyes closed a moment, as if the mind behind them had gone

"My parents were freaks of nature. They drifted from the common band until they had almost lost contact with the race-mind."

"That was something the race-mind could not tolerate?" asked Mr. Defender gently.

"No."

"So they were killed—*for having minds of their own?*"

A long pause and a slow, "Yes." The scrawl on the board was thin, shaky, barely decipherable.

"As you would have been had you not fled in sheer desperation?"

"Yes."

Mr. Defender eyed the judges. "I would like to put further questions to the fourth witness."

They signed agreement, and Professor Allain found his way back to the chair.

"Professor, as an expert who has made a long, personal study of my client, will you tell this court whether defendant is old or young."

"Young," said Allain promptly.

"Very young?"

"Fairly young," Allain responded. "Not quite an adult."

"Thank you." Mr. Defender let his mild, guileless gaze roam over the court. There was nothing in his plump features to warn them of the coming wallop. In quieter tones, he asked, "Male or female?"

"Female," said Allain.

A reporter dropped a book. That was the only sound for most of a minute. Then came a deep indrawn hiss of breath, a rapid ticking as

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cameras traversed to focus on Maeth, a running murmur of surprise from one end of the court to the other.

Back of the gallery, the most pungent cartoonist of the day tore up his latest effort, a sketch of defendant strapped to a rocket hell-bent for the Moon. It was captioned, "Spike's Hike." What could one call it—him—*her*, now? Spikina? He raked his hair, sought a new tack, knowing that there was none. You just can't crucify a small and lonely female.

Mr. Prosecutor sat with firmed lips and the fatalistic air of one who has had eighty percent of the ground snatched from under his feet. He knew his public. He could estimate their reaction to within ten thousand votes, plus or minus.

All stared at the golden eyes. They were still large, but somehow had become soft and luminous in a way not noticed before. You could see that now. Having been told, you could really *see* that they were feminine. And in some peculiar, inexplicable manner the outlines around them had become subdued, less outlandish, even vaguely and remotely human!

With effective technique, the defending attorney gave them plenty of time to stew their thoughts before carefully he struck again.

"Your Honors, there is one witness for my side."

Mr. Prosecutor rocked back, stared searchingly around the court. The judges polished their glasses, looked around also. One of them motioned to a court official who promptly bawled in stentorian tones.

"Defense witness!"

It shuttled around the great room in echoing murmurs. "Defense witness! There is a witness for the defense!"

A bald-headed little man came self-consciously from the public section, bearing a large envelope. Reaching the chair, he did not take it himself, but instead placed upon it a photograph blown up to four feet by three.

Court and cameras gave the picture no more than the briefest glance, for it was instantly recognisable. A lady holding a lamp.

Rising with a disapproving frown, the prosecuting attorney complained, "Your Honors, if my learned opponent is permitted to treat the Statue of Liberty as a witness he will thereby bring into ridicule the proceedings of this—."

A judge waved him down with the acid comment, "The bench is fully capable of asserting the dignity of this court." He shifted his attention to Mr. Defender, eyeing him over the tops of his glasses. "A witness may be defined as one able to assist the jury in arriving at a just conclusion."

"I am aware of that, Your Honor," assured Mr. Defender, not in the least disturbed.

"Very well." The judge leaned back slightly, baffled. "Let the

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court hear witness's statement."

Mr. Defender signed to the little man who immediately produced another large photograph and placed it over the first.

This was of the enormous plinth, with Liberty's bronze skirt-drapes barely visible at its top. There were words on the plinth, written bold and large. Some in the court gave the picture only another swift look, since they knew the words by heart, but others read them right through, once, twice, even three times.

Many had never seen the words before, including some who had passed near by them twice daily, for years. Cameras picked up the words, transmitted them pictorially to millions to whom they were new. An announcer recited them over the radio.

Send me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me—
I lift my Lamp beside the Golden Door.

In the deep, heart-searching silence that followed nobody noticed that Mr. Defender had bowed deeply to the judges and resumed his seat. The defense rested, having nothing more to add.

MIDNIGHT. A large stone cell with a metal grille, a bed, a table, two chairs and a radio in one corner. Maeth and the plump man sat there conversing, examining correspondence, watching the clock.

"The opposition picked a sloppy one with that crackpot's letter," remarked Mr. Defender. He could not refrain from expressing himself vocally though he knew full well that the other was hearing only the thoughts within his mind. He tapped a heavy forefinger on the bunch of missives at which they had been looking. "I could easily have countered him with this bunch written from a week ago to way back. But what was the use? They prove nothing except that all people don't think alike."

He sighed, stretched his arms wide and yawned, had his twentieth or thirtieth look at the clock, picked up another letter. "Listen to this one." He read it aloud.

"My son, aged thirteen, keeps pestering us to offer your client a home for at least a little while. I really don't know whether we are being wise in giving way to him, but we shall certainly suffer if we don't. We have a spare room here, and if your client is clean about the house and don't mind a bit of steam around on wash-days—."

His voice petered out as he had to yawn again. "They say it will be six in the morning before this public poll is complete. Bet you it's at least eight o'clock and maybe ten. They're always late with these things." He jerked around in vain

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effort to make himself more comfortable in his hard chair. "However, I'm staying with you until we've seen this through, one way or the other. And don't kid yourself I'm the only friend you've got." He pointed to the letters. "You've plenty there, and none of them certifiable."

Maeth ceased perusal of a note in uneven, spidery writing, reached for pencil and paper and scribbled, "Allain did not teach me enough words. What is a 'veteran'?" Having had it explained, she said, "I like this writer best. He has been hurt. If I am freed I will accept his invitation."

"Let me see." Taking the note, Mr. Defender read it, murmuring, "Um . . . um . . ." as he went along. He handed it back. "The choice is yours. You'll have something in common, anyway, since you'll both be coping with a cock-eyed world." Throwing a glance at the wall, he added, "That clock has gone into a crawl. It's going to take us a week to get to morning."

Somebody opened the grille with a jangle of keys, and Mr. Prosecutor came in. Grinning at his rival, he said, "Al, you sure make it tough for yourself in clink — you don't even use the comforts provided."

"Meaning what?"

"The radio."

Mr. Defender gave a disdainful sniff "Darn the radio. Noise, noise, noise. We've been busy reading—in peace and quiet." Sudden suspicion flooded his ample features. "What have we missed on the radio, if anything?"

"The midnight news." Mr. Prosecutor leaned on the edge of the table, still grinning. "They have thrown up the poll."

"They can't do that!" The defending attorney stood up, flushed with anger. "It was by international agreement that this case was—."

"They can do it in certain circumstances," interrupted the other. "Which are that a torrent of votes overwhelmingly in favor of your client has already made further counting a waste of time." He turned to Maeth, finished, "Just between you and me, Funny-face, I was never more happy to lose a fight."

THE man in the back room was nearing middle age, prematurely gray, and had long slender fingers that were sensitive tools. He was listening to the radio when the door-bell rang. There was no video in the room, only the radio softly playing a Polynesian melody. The bell jarred through the music, causing him to switch off and come upright. Very deliberately he moved around the room, through the door and into the passage.

Strange for anyone to call in the early evening. Not often that people came then. The mailman occasionally turned up in the morning and one or two tradesmen toward midday. Rarely did somebody ap-

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pear later, all too rarely. He was not expecting a visitor, either.

He trod gently along the passage toward the front door, his feet silent on the thick carpet, his right hand brushing the wall.

There was something mighty queer about this summons because as he neared the door he conceived the weird notion that he knew in advance who was waiting outside. The picture crept into his mind, shadowy but discernable, as if insinuated by some means he could not define, as if hopefully projected by one of those beyond the door. It was a picture of a big, plump, confident man accompanied by something small, all green and golden.

Despite past trials and stern testings which had made him what he was today, his nerves were passably good and he was not subject to delusions, or had not yet developed a tendency to delusions. So he was puzzled, even a little upset by preconceptions without any basis. He had never known a big, heavy man such as his brain was picturing, not even in other more normal days. As for the second one . . .

Here and there, of course, are people with greatly sharpened senses, with odd aptitudes developed to an extreme. That was to be expected, for the fates were kind and provided compensations. Without them, it would be hard to get around. But he knew his own, and they included none like this.

His fingers, usually so precise, fumbled badly as they sought the door-latch, almost as if they had temporarily forgotten where it was placed. Then, finding it, they began to turn the lock, and at that point a thin piping voice came into his mind as clearly as a tinkling bell.

"Open please—*I am your eyes!*"

THE END

COMING IN THE OCTOBER ISSUE . . On Sale Aug. 31

THE END OF SCIENCE-FICTION - - - *by Robert Bloch.* With the 9th annual science-fiction convention just around the corner, this story struck us as very appropriate - - - and perhaps grimly prophetic

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DOWN IN THE

By Joe Gibson

It was a hundred years of progress, it was a hundred years of destruction, it was the Century of Great Dreams, it was the Century of Vast Illusions—thus, the era our early science-fiction writers depicted thud-and-blunderingly with Space Patrol and space pirates, ray-guns and rocket ships, bug-eyed monsters and beautiful maidens. It was all of that, and more!

It was the Twenty-Second Century—

Waldo Heinlein III
History And My Ancestors; 2354 A.D.

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MISTY MOUNTAINS

Riders of the Ring.

PIRACY was a problem of vectors. The ship went this way, accelerated that way, through a gravitational drag another way, with a centrifugal force curving through there. Somewhere in that tridimensional pattern, jet-thrust was so much in such-and-such tubes according to mass-ratio and grav drag; grav plates adjusted so much according to stress curve and power available; power turbines were revved up according to fuel available for maximum output and possible future necessities.

A pirate couldn't be a fool.

Kim Rothman reminded himself of that fact as he watched the bright green spark glide across the radar scope.

That green spark was a space freighter, three months out from Lunaport, Earth, and bound for the New Holdings in the Jovian Moon-System. That freighter would be loaded with machinery, spare parts, mail and luxuries—the soap, coffee, and chocolate bar trade.

In the sleek, black hull of the pi-

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rate cruiser *Voodoo,* there were twenty-seven men from Marsport who wanted that space freighter. And Kim Rothman, seated at the broad control bank under the transparent blister, high on the cruiser's back, was supposed to get that freighter for them.

There were five billion people on Earth, and they were prosperous. They had plenty of skilled manpower and plenty of factories.

Hardier, pioneering individuals had settled the other planets. They had some factories inside their sealed, domed cities, and were self-sufficient so far as elementary necessities—air, water, food, and atomic fuel—were concerned. But, being so few and having to do so much just to stay alive on their alien worlds, they had neither the time nor the materials for manufacturing the luxury items, the comforts of civilization, the automatic machinery to make spare parts for their machines. These, they bought from Earth, in exchange for the minerals and produce grubbed out of the alien soil of their world.

And Earth charged high. Too high. The struggling, hard-working settlers just couldn't meet the prices demanded by Earth—demanded, of course, so that the people of Earth could live in the luxurious comfort to which they were accustomed.

So the settlers had simply been forced to stop buying.

And the Earth government, the United Nations, promptly revised the Articles of Space. Henceforth, interplanetary colonization could be conducted by large corporations on Earth, would be owned and operated by these corporations on Earth, and colonists would be employees of the corporations rather than free settlers. And the corporations would answer to the Earth government.

It was a mistake. There were civil uprisings in the domed cities of Mars, Venus, and Mercury.

The Earth government wouldn't back down. They placed an embargo on shipments to these worlds. They authorized the corporations to build, operate, and maintain their own spacecraft.

Until then, all spacecraft had been government-owned, operated by government-approved space crews. The spacemen had become an almost legendary breed of heroes, driving their ships across the black void to bring supplies to the far-flung settlements—often when such supplies were a matter of life-and-death.

But if the corporations owned spacecraft, the crews would have to follow the orders of the corporations. There would be no more swinging off course and forgetting your destination to answer the distress call of some colony of free settlers. Tradesmen lost money when that happened, but lives were often saved. The corporations wouldn't allow it—unless a distress call was relayed through their home offices on Earth and the news syndicates notified so

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for it!

The spacemen didn't like it.

Government-owned spacecraft began to disappear, complete with government-approved crews.

So Kim Rothman sat at the controls of his pirate cruiser *Voodoo,* carefully plotting his "run" on a space freighter five million miles away. The space freighter was a corporation ship, bound for the corporation-owned New Holdings in the Jovian Moon-System.

And behind Kim Rothman, in the crew's quarters of his cruiser, were twenty-seven men from Marsport who wanted to take over that space freighter and drive it back to Mars. The free settlers on Mars needed that cargo of machinery and spare parts. They couldn't get it from Earth. Not directly or legally.

Of such things, pirates are made.

KIM'S lean, strong hands leaped over the keyboard, his fingers deftly punching the proper keys. The pilot-computor clattered and yuk-yuked and twittered at his elbow. Bright little numbers leaped gloweringly onto a frosted slot. The data was integrated and signal lights flashed blue.

Target plotted; interception and coordination computed; ready in twelve minutes, fourteen seconds.

A female operative could have set up the pilot-computor much more easily and swiftly than he had. Women's reflexes were faster, which was why they were Second Officers aboard all larger spacecraft. But a man could coordinate the data to be fed the pilot-computor much easier and more comprehensively than a woman. Computors need cold, hard facts interwoven into a complete pattern. They would not compute intuition, which made men First Officers aboard larger spacecraft.

But both tasks were equally important in the operation of a ship. Both had to be done with precision and understanding; neither was valid without the other.

Kim was frankly wishing he had a female team-mate on the *Voodoo.* The little cruiser wasn't meant for major space maneuvers; its control pit wasn't designed for a man-woman team. He knew he wouldn't have a really efficient pirate ship until he'd redesigned it—and had a girl who'd ride with him.

He locked the controls in their computed settings and flicked on the intercom screen. "Korsak!" he called quietly.

Korsak's thin, pointed face loomed on the screen. He was a typically tall, lean Mars colonist, the son of a son of a Mars colonist. And he was a "government-approved" spaceman who wanted to pilot that freighter back to Mars.

"Hi, Rothman," he said. "About time, isn't it?"

Kim nodded casually. "I've already screened and set. Tell your men to prepare for four minutes' eight-gee acceleration."

Korsak scowled darkly. "Four

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minutes? That's kinda rough!"

"I've shaved it as far as I can," Kim told him. "The gravplates will be on full fifty gees through the apex of the vector. Just pray we don't blow a circuit."

"They'll take evasive action!" Korsak argued; he wasn't familiar with the piracy game. "You sure we can coordinate?"

"There's some risk," Kim admitted. "The computors allow for human decisions to a large extent, though. Better strap down—you've got eleven minutes!"

"Check!" Korsak gave a curt nod and the screen went blank.

Kim surveyed the instruments, critically, then heaved a sigh of resignation and began to adjust his seat straps.

Dazzling fire burst from the tubes of the little cruiser. It slithered ahead, a slender, black needle in the dark emptiness of space.

Two million miles away, radar scopes registered on the control bridge of the freighter. Trajectories were computed; alarm bells clamored. A tall stout man studied the figures on the slots before him, made a grim decision, and spoke to his wife. The calm, efficient woman ran her fingers over the wide console keyboard. Red lights flashed in the crew-decks below as the freighter blasted its forward jet and heeled over. Then it cut back, crossed its former trajectory, its steel plates groaning with strain.

But the black ship followed. It closed in, slowly.

The freighter decelerated, all its forward jets spewing fire.

The black ship decelerated.

The freighter snapped off its forward jets; then its main jets opened up. It accelerated, shot forward.

The black ship accelerated.

Each action, in itself, meant little. The timing of each action meant everything. The pirate was a tiny green spark on the freighter's scopes; it was closing in on a long, shallow curve that dipped and swirled in gyrations that matched the freighter's exact maneuvers.

They were two thousand miles apart when the screens went up and the gun-crews manned their batteries.

Kim dragged himself back to a red-hazed consciousness and activated his own battery, six projectors mounted in a ball-turret on the cruiser's nose.

He held his fire until the freighter opened up. Two thin beams lanced out from the freighter's amidships; another shot from its nose.

He swerved the little cruiser and the beams broke off the curved shell of the force-screen. Only a direct hit would penetrate. But each dodging maneuver cost him speed. The freighter could hold him off past coordination limit unless he made a direct hit.

The freighter couldn't maneuver as easily. He capitalized on that weakness, set his fire-control to utilize it, and pressed the red firing stud.

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Then he collapsed back in his seat, sweat pouring down the sagging muscles of his body. A sudden lurch left him weightless, sickened. Then acceleration clamped down again.

The beams lanced back and forth, automatically. They shattered off the invisible spheres of the force-screens. The ships closed in to a thousand miles; five hundred . . .

The final beam went exactly where Kim intended it. The cruiser was sweeping past the giant freighter, overshooting the coordination limit, when its beam shot back and crashed through the freighter's screen, hit the main jets and tore them from their mountings with a blinding flare of radiance. Then the cruiser decelerated sharply, retrograding back into the coordination limit. It floated serenely off the crippled freighter's right flank, level with the Solar Ecliptic.

Kim massaged the aching muscles of his face. His whole body tingled with needles of pain. He gulped air into his laboring lungs, blinked his tear-dimmed eyes, flexed his hands to get the knots of pain out of them. Then he flicked on the intercom.

"Pile out, Korsak!" he ordered hoarsely.

The colonist's thin face appeared on the screen, grinning wearily. "We are scrambling into our trappings now, Rothman. How does she look?"

Kim turned his head to stare out the transparent blister at the huge yards away. Sunlight blazed along her torn, mangled tail. Her nose was in deep gloom, invisible against the blackness of space, save for the yellow lights glowing from her portholes.

"She's hulled, aft," Kim reported thoughtfully. "Power turbines are gone—you can't run beam projectors on battery juice!—and her free air has escaped. You may have a stiff fight with her crew."

"We'll handle that," Korsak prophesied grimly. "How extensive is her damage—and are the cargo holds all right?"

"Cargo holds are intact," Kim replied. "But her main jets are gone beyond repair. You'll have to ride her back to Mars on auxiliary jets and set her on Phobos. She'd never make a planet-fall. If her turbines are shot, you may have to remain in spacesuits. It'll be a good six months' voyage, I'm afraid."

Korsak nodded. "We'll check when we get aboard. A beam kissed us, down here! You've got a leak in your belly plates under the turbine chamber; nothing serious. We've sealed the locks.

"I'll look at it," Kim said. "Get going."

The airlock swung open on the black hull and twenty-seven figures in bulky spacesuits jumped into space. Tiny rockets spouted flame from the tips of metal V-frames on their backs, and they floated off toward the giant, helpless hulk of the

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Kim watched them go with a dull, numbing relief. His job was done. He had five thousand credits stuffed into the belt around his waist. He only waited to see that the final provision of his contract was carried out.

The tiny, antlike figures disappeared in the gloom of the freighter's hull. The blue flares of cutting torches appeared.

Kim loosened his seat straps, unzipped the top of his spacesuit, and fished his cigarettes out of his jacket pocket. He puffed a cigarette alight, crossed his arms over his thickly padded chest, and waited.

Twenty minutes later, a small lifeboat roared out of its launching slot in the freighter's hull. He caught a brief glimpse of the spacesuited freighter-crew under the transparent shell of the little craft; then it shot off into the star-sprinkled emptiness.

The communications light flashed on, before him. He tuned the intercom screen and flicked it on.

Korsak gave him a lopsided grin through the thick quartzite of a fishbowl helmet. "We're in, Rothman!"

"Everything check?" Kim asked brusquely.

Korsak nodded. "Killed two men and a woman—gun crew-members. They put up a fight while the others barricaded themselves on the control bridge. We lost four men before we got 'em. We evacuated nine people, all the survivors, in that boat. They've got enough fuel and provisions to raise Ceres."

"I'll check when I reach Ceres," Kim promised.

Korsak chuckled. "I know you will! Our agent will contact you there, if we've any more jobs lined up."

"Have a good voyage," Kim muttered, and flicked off the screen.

He crawled out of his seat and climbed wearily down the ladderwell to the cruiser's main salon. His gaze went yearningly to the liquor cabinet, set flush in the comfortable, luxurious wall furnishings, then he swung away and stamped heavily aft. He reached up with a gloved hand and rocked the fishbowl helmet forward, over his head.

He had to repair that leak, first. Then he had a three-week's cruise to Ceres. Alone. And there weren't any new magazines and telerecordings in the small library to help while away that time. He couldn't even open up with the ship's radio and talk to the far-flung Space Communications stations — they'd take a reading of his transmitter and vector him back to the spot that freighter was attacked. Then the Space Fleet would be alerted. They'd come barrelling out to intercept him.

The so-called Space Fleet was more precisely the "Earth Fleet," organized to stop these pirate raids on the ships and outposts of the Earth corporations.

The little *Voodoo* would be no match for any one of their huge dreadnaughts.

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He was alone. Completely alone. If he were in trouble, he couldn't call for help. There was no help for a pirate . . . no help for a pirate . . .

Blast it, he needed a pardner!

CERESPORT was a domed frontier outpost on the Asteroid Belt —the Ring, as it was called in spacemen's parlance. There was the giant dome and a flat, rocky plain, nothing more. The plain was usually littered with the small, blackened cruisers of asteroid prospectors and mining crews, plus the occasional fat cigar of a supply freighter. Space Fleet dreadnaughts dropped in now and then, eyeing the little, nondescript ships with hostile suspicion.

For good reason, of course; not a few of Ceresport's "prospectors" were space pirates.

It was a wild, free outpost. Its habitues, men, women, and children, were a tough breed and knew it. Everyone over twelve years of age carried a holstered Maxim needle-gun. Like any free society far from the lawful restraint of civilization, it bred a few individuals who used their complete freedom to steal from others. Claim-jumping was an everyday occurrance; murder averaged twice a week.

These people were intelligent. No illiterate could handle a spacecraft in the jumbled rock of the Ring. But honor and crime have no respect for technical training. Criminals are intelligent, too.

Kim brought the *Voodoo* sizzling in over the field, fire streaking from the forward jets. The little ship slewed to a halt above a cleared area and settled gently to the rock on her humming gravs. His spacesuited figure leaped down from the airlock and went skipping across the field, almost weightless in the planetoid's faint gravity.

He spotted the lifeboat near the dome, nodded his satisfaction, and bounded up to the city's giant entrance locks. He opened the outer portal and let himself in, sealed it and released air into the chamber. The inner portal opened automatically. He stepped through, feeling the underground grav-plates drag him down with normal one-gee, and walked over to the Locker Room.

His spacesuit went into a rented locker, and he buckled a pair of .003 mm. Maxim guns about his thighs and strolled on into the city.

He was a tall, lean figure in jacket and shorts. His hair was brown, his eyes gray, his features well-formed but lacking any striking quality of handsomeness. He wasn't muscular, was neither fat nor thin. His appearance was of the common, ordinary kind that people passed up without so much as a glance.

He had come to appreciate that, since assuming his pirate role. He noticed it, happily, as he strolled along the broad corridors past the solid doorways of residence apartments and the bright windows of shops, restaurants, and taverns.

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There were three thousand people in Ceresport, plus a usual five or six thousand transients. His presence would go unheralded.

He rode the escalators to Level Nine, the observation level under the transparent roof at the very top of the giant dome. Level Nine was famous throughout the Ring. It was the spacemen's meeting-place, a broad, circular chamber with an oval bar and scores of small upholstered booths. Robot waiters scurried about on silent rollers, serving the men and women who sprawled in the booths, conversing in a loud murmur of sound while the stars glared down coldly from above.

Barney Gruka, the fat, ponderous proprietor of Level Nine, was stationed at his usual place in the small, glass-enclosed booth behind the entrance. His chill blue gaze flickered over Kim as the young spaceman approached the booth, but his puffy features showed no hint of recognition. Kim was acquainted with that ruse. He pushed aside the glass panel and eased himself into the seat across from Barney. The proprietor's fat hands played over the keyboard in the table-top and a cool, iced drink plopped from a wall slot at Kim's elbow. The glass panel slid itself closed, shutting out the rumble of voices.

"Welcome back, Rothman," Barney greeted softly. His face retained its plump, smooth blankness. Nothing moved but the chill eyes and the fat lower lip.

Kim gazed at him musingly. There had never been a killing in Level Nine. No man had ever pulled a Maxim gun without having one of Barney's little steel robots grab him, shattering his gun-hand. And few things were said or even hinted at in Level Nine without Barney knowing about it. In fact, there were few people in Ceresport whose life-histories weren't completely documented in the memory-files of the fat man's cunning brain—few people wandering along the Ring, itself, that he didn't at least know about.

"Anyone looking for me, Barney?" Kim asked gently.

The chill gaze touched him, briefly, and the lower lip stuck out in a faint pout. "Pay me," Barney demanded in his soft, liquid voice. "You know the rates."

Kim slipped a few credit-notes out of his belt and laid them on the table, his palm covering them.

"No one is looking for Kim Rothman," Barney complied readily. "The survivors of the *Walrus*, a corporation freighter, are looking for the pirate who jumped them on the Earth-Jupiter run, three weeks ago. There are nine of them; three were killed when the pirates boarded the *Walrus*. Howard Tucker is First Officer."

Kim slid the credits across the table. They vanished up a loose sleeve in Barney's green satin tunic.

"One of the men killed was an investigator for the Biochemical Research Department," Barney re-

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marked absently. "The corporations paid the Earth government to send him out for an investigation of the New Holdings on Ganymede. Some sort of corrosive agent is attacking the metal of their domes."

Kim tasted his drink, cautiously. The pungent liquor stung his nostrils. He set it down. "The Earth government isn't going to like having their investigator knocked off. The Space Fleet will probably put a price on that pirate's head."

"That is a minor detail," Barney scoffed, his eyes constantly shifting, watching. "Space is an interesting place, Rothman. It has some interesting tales. Some men change when they get out here."

"This investigator changed?"

"There is a girl, a Miss Frances Freemont, who was assigned the investigator's assistant," Barney explained. "She's one of the survivors. She says her investigator turned wolf in space, tried to attack her in her stateroom, had to have some sense beaten into him by some of the ship's crew. She's not sorry she won't be his assistant, now."

Kim grimaced wryly. "That could be true or false. Maybe she claimed she was attacked, hoping the dumb investigator would fire her from the job on Callisto. Maybe she wanted to be a camp woman—"

"Possibly," Barney admitted. "She hasn't been flirtatious here, though. And she has a Second Officer's certificate."

Kim took out his cigarettes, rose, and pushed the glass panel open. "Thanks," he said. "I'll drop by again sometime." Stepping out of the booth, he poked a cigarette between his lips and strolled toward the long, oval bar.

Some men thought Barney Gruka knew too much. A number of men had tried to remove him. None had succeeded nor lived to tell about it. Kim felt a keen irritation at the fat proprietor's shrewd knowledge, but he had no intention of challenging it. Barney also kept his mouth shut, when he was paid enough. Kim paid him enough.

A robot bartender brought Kim the mild, tasteful liquor he ordered. He filled his glass and hooked his elbows solidly on the bar. Men and women jostled and talked around him. Most of them wore jackets and shorts, though a few men wore trousers and a few women wore skirts. All of them wore guns. They were husky, well-formed people with light tan complexions. A few exceptions were negroes and whites, the two "vanishing races" of Earth. There were several seven-foot, dark-skinned sons of Mars, a couple of pinkish-white sons of Venus. Some men were close-shaven, some women's hair fell to their hips. There was one family of baldies, a man-and-wife team who preferred to shave their heads. It was a matter of personal preference.

Kim studied them all, savoured their talk. The words were a fantastic mixture of languages, though

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most of them spoke the spacemen's form of pidgin English with familiar phrases, and expressions of French, German, Cantonese, Nipponese, Spanish, and Russian thrown in. He recognized the speech of one husky male-female team as Mongolian.

His elbow was nudged gently. He turned to find a grinning, curvacious girl standing beside him. "Come over to my booth and let's talk," she invited musically.

Kim shook his head. "I'm not in the mood for happy talk," he replied gravely.

The girl's eyes narrowed and her slender hand dropped to the gun on her hip. She surveyed him slowly from head to foot, then turned and stalked off, hips wriggling sinuously. The holstered gun slapped against her leg.

Kim shrugged and turned back to his drink. He had no liking either for alcohol or women, the two chief diversions offered at any frontier outpost. Some spacemen went in for both as soon as they hit a port. Some spacewomen teamed with men and lived with them during voyages, then went seeking variety as soon as they hit port and eventually shipped out with another man. Some spacemen and women worked as teams and lived strictly apart on voyages. Some married and stayed together as teams, even raising their children aboard ship. Moral integrity, or the lack of it, had little bearing on how well they did their jobs.

It was a phenomenon of human nature that often intrigued him, drawing his thoughts off into a wandering tangent as was the usual habit of a man who spent long weeks alone. Kim shook his head, grinning to himself, and sipped his drink. He had other things to think about!

First, the *Voodoo* had to be fueled and provisioned, worn-out parts replaced and mechanisms inspected and overhauled. Second, he had to meet the agent from Marsport who, according to Barney, obviously had not arrived yet. And third - -

Third, he had to find a team-mate!

Kim scowled, perplexedly. He knew himself to be an admirer of moral integrity. His social prejudice would never quite allow him to have complete trust in a female team-mate who practiced sex as a means of purely personal enjoyment. To him, such promiscuity was too emotionally selfish of either man or woman. He couldn't respect such an individual. He wouldn't want to share weeks and months with a woman like that.

His team-mate would have to appreciate moral values. At the same time, she would have to agree with the principles that made him a pirate to the extent of becoming a pirate, herself.

Such a girl was not easily found. Most of them became wives of spacemen shortly after graduating from the Space Academy.

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The ideal team-mate would be a girl who agreed to join him, was attracted to him, and eventually mated with him. There were no marriages for pirates. His name and the *Voodoo's* former name were down on the Earth government's lists as a deserter; capture meant life imprisonment. It would have to be a common-law marriage.

He didn't have one chance in a million of finding such a girl on the Ring. Spacewomen who accepted commissions out here, where men and women rode the asteroids alone, were not those who wanted respect and decent team-mates.

"You're sure deep in thought!" a new voice growled at his elbow.

Kim turned and grinned at a tall, grizzled spaceman. "Kind of hard to lose the habit when you're just in from space, lone voyage," he admitted, moving aside to give the stranger room at the bar.

"My name's Ackerman," the spaceman said, running a nervous hand through his graying hair. "That must've been you that came sizzling over the dome, half an hour ago!"

Kim nodded. "I just sold out a rich claim to a mining outfit," he lied pleasantly. "Guess I'll rest up a few days or a week, maybe, and strike out again."

Ackerman pressed the bar-stud, signalling the robot bartender. "I got a pitchblend claim out on Dead Pete. Come in for supplies day before yesterday. Guess I'll go back when my pockets are empty." He chuckled drily and ordered a stiff shot of Venusian rhum from the bartender, which blinked its nose-light in acknowledgement.

"Does a man good to get in, once in a while," he continued, turning back to Kim. "Eat some good food, 'stead of concentrates. Have a few drinks. Associate with other people." His thoughtful brown gaze studied Kim's features, speculatively. "If my claim was rich enough to sell out for mining, I'd fuel up and head back to Earth!" he added, then hastily amended, "I mean no insults!"

Kim stilled the hand that had started toward his hip, put it back on the bar. "My name's Rothman," he replied easily.

Ackerman nodded. "Glad to meet you. Saw you brush off the buxom babe, a few minutes ago. She's been trying every lone guy in the joint!"

"You brushed her off, too?" Kim asked guardedly.

"I turned and walked off. My back itched, though—I'm glad they don't allow killings in Level Nine!" Ackerman picked up his drink as the robot slid it before him. "I've a few friends here in Ceresport," he added, sipping his drink. "There's a family I can always stay with when I'm here. It's nice to be welcome someplace, toddle some youngsters on your knee and tell 'em space tales."

Kim frowned in faint irritation. This he knew was another result

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of loneliness with some men: when they got back among their own kind, they talked and talked and talked to anyone who'd listen to them.

He started to pick up his drink and move away when Ackerman asked, suddenly, "You wouldn't consider a run back to Earth?"

Kim started visibly. "What makes you ask that?" he demanded.

Ackerman was giving him the thoughtful stare again. "There's a young lady here named Fran Freemont," the grizzled spaceman said quietly. "She's looking for passage back to Earth. The supply ship isn't due out for another three months!" He set his drink on the bar and faced Kim, squarely. "I think you're a man she could trust, Rothman!"

Kim felt a tight constriction in his throat. "Thanks," he said gruffly. "But it just happens I'm not going back to Earth."

The Girl From Earth.

HE spent the first three days provisioning and doing maintenance on the *Voodoo*. He slept on the ship, ate his meals at the city restaurants, and spent his spare time wandering around the broad corridors. He spent an afternoon with Ackerman at the apartment of the family the spaceman knew, playing poker for small stakes. He watched the spaceport field closely, noting the arrival and departure of each craft.

The agent from Marsport still hadn't arrived.

He was having dinner in the Black Vein Restaurant on Level Four when a small, skinny man walked over and slipped into the booth across from him. He looked up, blankly querilous.

"Barney says someone is looking for passage to Earth," the little man said, without introduction.

"So she finally want to Barney, huh?" Kim smiled grimly.

"She can't make passage out," the little man said. "There's no ships leaving. She'll pay a thousand credits to get back to Earth, no questions asked."

Kim's brows went up. "That gal's kinda anxious!"

"Message center got an ethergram, yesterday." The little man was brimful of information. "She's wanted for a special expedition to Venus—something about her being an authority on Venusian mammals. She'll get a promotion if she can make it."

Kim forked hunks of steak into his mouth and chewed thoughtfully. "Wha'd Barney say?" he mumbled.

"Nothing. You're here, your contact hasn't shown up. Barney wants ten percent."

"Does he, now?" Kim considered, musingly. Nine hundred credits was still a nice profit for a run to Earth. It was all downhill, toward the Sun's attraction. He could slip in to Earth, if he had a place to hide the *Voodoo*.

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The little man seemed to read his thoughts. "She says she knows where a deserter ship could be hidden," he said. "Her family's some sort of well-to-do scientist outfit, has an estate in the Mongolian plateau country."

"Tell Barney I'll see her," Kim said decisively.

The little man slid out of the booth and walked away.

Kim finished his meal and returned to his ship. He pulled off his spacesuit in the airlock and clamped it to the wall, then strolled on into the main salon.

"Hello," the girl's voice said.

He whirled, yanking out his guns.

She was sitting in the low seat in the corner of the salon. Her figure was small, neatly rounded, attractive. She wore a two-piece garment of rich blue, embroidered in silver, a sort of scant bolero jacket and short, swinging skirt. It was rakish, fashionable, civilized; its color matched her eyes, which widened as she stared into the muzzle coils of his guns.

Kim lowered his guns and scrutinized her, critically. Her hair was brown, close-cropped, carefully waved. Her skin was pale, like new ivory, her lips small and petulant red. Her fingernails were manicured. Her shapely knees were crossed, her legs smooth and firm. She did a lot more primping than most spacewomen, dressed for appearance rather than comfort or utility, and didn't wear a gun.

"You're Fran Freemont," he stated flatly.

She folded her hands on her knees, nervously, and tried to appear calm. "Is it that obvious?" she asked.

"I'm afraid it is." Kim nodded, holstering his guns. "You look like a well-paid government job with the Biochemical Research Department. How did you get out here?"

"I rented a spacesuit and came out!"

He arched a critical brow. "In that outfit? In a *spacesuit?*"

"It doesn't wrinkle," she replied evenly. Somehow, she seemed more sure of herself, then. "After I talked to Mr. Gruka in Level Nine, I watched him and followed the man he sent to talk to you. So I knew you were the man I wanted to see."

"Why do it that way?" Kim asked, puzzled.

"I was afraid you might say no," she explained cryptically. Her gaze was steady, unflinching.

"If I had, nothing you could do would change it," Kim said, taking out his cigarettes.

She shrugged indifferently. "I didn't know that. But if you said yes, there's something else."

Kim puffed a cigarette alight. "What?" he demanded.

"I'll pay you one thousand credits and we'll take off for Earth immediately," she said in her cool, even tones. "Then you won't have to pay Mr. Gruka any percentage."

Kim grinned sourly. "Neat," he

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said. "But first, you'll go back and pay Barney Gruka one hundred credits."

Fran Freemont looked vaguely surprised. "Well!" she exclaimed. "There *is* honor among thieves!"

Kim felt deeply grateful that she hadn't said pirates. "Among a few of us, let's say," he corrected mildly. "And somehow, we few seem to have an ability to stay alive longer than the others. Also, it's easier to do business."

Her lips pressed together in faint irritation. "Couldn't you pay Mr. Gruka next time you came to Ceresport?"

"Barney would hardly appreciate that attitude," Kim chided, grinning. "I may be dead before I ever get back to Ceresport!"

She rose with a sigh of resignation. "All right, then. I suppose I'll just have to climb into my spacesuit and go back to pay him!"

Kim nodded mockingly. "I suppose you will!"

He stood in the control pit, topside, and watched her bulky, spacesuited form move awkwardly back across the field. There was a dim shadow of emotion somewhere back in his mind that had prompted him to take her proposition. Otherwise, he hadn't had any intention of making a trip to Earth. He frowned, trying to puzzle it out.

Maybe it was just the rakehell humor of the deal, pirating an Earth corporation space freighter, then taking one of the freighter's survivors back to Earth and flaunting himself under Earth's very nose! Spitting in the devil's left green eye, so to speak! Buckling a swash!

Well, he was a pirate, wasn't he?

The trouble was, *how did she know which ship was his?*

The answer came with a faint, muffled hammering on the *Voodoo's* hull, below.

Kim descended the ladder-well and went back to the airlock chamber. He pressed the stud that flashed the green "welcome" light outside and peered through the porthole as three shadowy, spacesuited figures shuffled into the lock. Air hissed from the valves as they closed the outer portal behind them, then the inner portal swung aside and they stepped in to face him.

The first visitor flung back his helmet with a sigh of relief. "Good evening, Mr. Rothman!" he said pleasantly.

He was a small, sandy-haired man with a pink-cheeked face and a little mustache. Very dapper. The two men behind him were big, wide, husky, and ugly as sin.

"You know me and I don't know you," Kim replied casually. "And what makes it so good?"

"One thing makes it a very charming evening," the sandy-haired man said, smiling. He had a sneaky smile, Kim thought. "The one thing," he explained patiently, "is that no one was forced to have any accidents. It all worked out very well, and my name is Ted Brown."

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"Well, Mr. Brown," Kim said, through his most charming smile, "I would ask you and Bill Smith and John Jones, here, to come in and have a drink—only, people who talk about accidents make me nervous!"

Mr. Brown nodded amicably. "Quite understandable, Mr. Rothman. I shall be more specific. The young lady who asked the identity of your ship was, I believe, interested in making a deal with you. She desires to return to Earth, which is very commendable except that we have no desire to see you journey to Earth."

"Why not, please?" Kim inquired gently.

"Because," said Mr. Brown, placing his gloved fingertips together, "we have a deal which we wish to make with you, Mr. Rothman."

Kim stared at the two men behind Mr. Brown, at the way their gloved hands rested on the butts of their Maxim pistols. "Do come to the point, Mr. Brown," he muttered.

"Precisely!" Mr. Brown nodded. "I, sir, am here as a representative of the Earth corporations which have interests in the New Holdings of the Jovian Moon-System!"

Kim switched his stare back to the sandy-haired man. "You're *what?*" he gasped.

Brown laughed shyly. "Let me finish, sir! As you probably know, we have lost considerable money in the New Holdings. Our space freighters are being raided, our employees are in a bad humor, and our stocks are taking a terrible beating—this, in spite of all the Space Fleet can do to keep down these pirates, mind you!"

Kim's mouth gaped open. He couldn't believe it! They weren't—

But they were! "It is my purpose," said Brown smiling, "to contract a number of space pirates to raid the supply ships that trade at the free ports of Mars and Venus, Mr. Rothman, and sell their loot to us! Fight fire with fire, you understand!"

Kim controlled his features with an effort. "What makes you think I'd be interested?" he asked drily.

"Both you and this ship are on the Earth government's deserter list," Brown replied smugly. "Please, Mr. Rothman, let's not quibble. We shall be proud to consider your immediate services, sir."

"Suppose I'm *not* interested?" Kim asked.

Brown's pale blue eyes became frosty. "We should be deeply disappointed. In fact, I might tell you that if Miss Freemont hadn't left here, after obviously having you refuse her proposition, we should never have allowed this ship to leave Ceres! Our ship is just twenty yards away, Mr. Rothman, and we had our batteries trained on you every second!"

"In short, if I refuse—"

"It will be fatal!"

Kim's first shot holed the big, wide, ugly man on the right. His

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second shot caught the big, wide, ugly man on the left, just as that worthy gentleman got his gun free. Both gentlemen were quite instantly dead, rendering the airlock chamber somewhat messy.

Mr. Brown skipped backward with a small, gurgling scream. Kim felt utter loathing, rather than anger, as he blew the small man's pale blue eyes and sandy hair into a bloody smear on the aft bulkhead.

Kim unbuckled his guns and donned his spacesuit. There was a cold lump in his stomach and his limbs felt dead. He dragged the three corpses into the airlock, closed the inner portal, pumped the air out, and opened the outer portal.

The huge, balloon-shaped bulk of Barney Gruka, in spacesuit, stood in the cold starlight outside, staring up at him.

"You all right?" Barney asked, through the helmet phones.

"Well as can be expected," Kim answered.

Barney gave a moist, whistling sigh. "I was afraid I hadn't figured out their game in time—"

"You didn't," Kim interrupted mildly. "Help me unload 'em."

Barney stood rooted to the spot as Kim stooped, lifted Mr. Brown's body, and heaved it forward out the airlock door. The body flipped over and tumbled onto the barren rock like a limp sack.

"I'll get somebody to bury 'em," Barney said softly.

IT took ten weeks to reach Earth. Two and a half months in which the *Voodoo* seemed to be standing still in the black emptiness of the Universe. Human perspective narrowed down and a ship became a world on such long trips.

Kim had the airlock chamber mopped down and scrubbed before the girl returned from the Ceresport dome. He was in the salon mixing drinks when she entered, informing him that her luggage was already aboard and, if he didn't mind, she was anxious to leave that godforsaken space-hole behind her. Fran Freemont hardly appreciated Ceres.

The harsh sunlight was just splattering the tips of the jagged rock hills when they lifted. Kim locked the controls in their automatic settings and there was nothing more to that; he merely had to take an occasional star-reading to check the computed course and inspect the ship's mechanisms regularly to see that they functioned.

He moved his belongings out of the small main stateroom and left it to Fran, moving into the large crew's quarters amidships. He didn't want her to notice the deck-fittings where twenty-seven acceleraton couches had been mounted — he'd had the couches removed at Ceresport—because she just might reach the proper conclusions.

Fran Freemont was far from being naive. He learned that as they spent long hours in the control pit

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he sprawled in his seat before the broad bank, watching the instrument readings for signs of trouble, and she perched behind him with her slim legs swinging over the edge of the ladder-well. There were breathless moments when red signal-lights flashed and the screen flicked on automatically, sights of awesome beauty as meteorite swarms crept out of the blackness and rained against the screen in brilliant splashes of fire. Once, the radar scope flashed into life and a fist-sized meteorite made a bright green streak across it.

Their conversations began in halting monosyllables; then gradually grew from habit. Fran was the daughter of an agricultural chemist who did government research on Venus; she was born in Venusport, grew up on Earth. Her mother's family was the famous Chao-Tang, reknowned for the geological findings of the three Chao-Tang brothers, her uncles. It was a traditional family of scholars and scientists in the Orient. Fran held out her arm, showing him her ivory skin, with a faint smile; she told him of her childhood, a comfortable, happy childhood in her parents' small home, and of breath-taking visits to the wealthy Chao-Tang estate. Her young astuteness was duly noted and she was well-educated, graduating from the Space Academy and earning her Master's degree in biochemistry at the University of Prague.

Her blithe narration loosened Kim's reluctant tongue. He told of his parents, prospectors of the Asteroid Belt who migrated from Earth's Middle East; he was born in their small cruiser, grew up on the Ring. They had paid his passage to Lunaport, where he graduated from the Space Academy, and he returned to establish a shuttle-supply service to the prospectors' diggings and mining claims around the Ring. That was before the Earth government revised the Articles of Space . . .

His parents had gone out on a prospecting jaunt, once, and had never returned.

Fran lapsed into sorrowful silence whenever Kim spoke of the hardships of his youth—the food concentrates, the stale tanked water, the necessity of a young boy learning the mechanical functions and maintenance of a spacecraft—and she didn't share his laughter as he related his first sight of Lunaport, when he was fifteen, and his first television show, his first pair of long pants, his first volley-ball game. Kim noticed her silence and ceased talking about himself; he reverted to questioning, drawing her out of her own shell.

Her father's work and her faint memories of Venusport had prompted her to take up biochemistry—Venus was a hothouse planet of seething, ferocious life. "That's why I simply *had* to get back to Earth!" she exclaimed happily, as they were seated at dinner one late watch.

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Kim's gaze drank in the beauty of her small, oval face in the soft light of the salon. "All I heard was that they had some special expedition lined up for Venus," he admitted, between mouthfuls. It was a relief that his normal, wolfish eating habits no longer bothered her. "And if you could make it," he went on, "they'd give you a promotion."

"Oh, that's nothing as far as I'm concerned!" she refuted gaily. "The important thing is this—would you believe it!—they've *discovered intelligent life on Venus!*"

"Uh?" Kim straightened up in surprise.

"The old legends about the Venusians are *true!*" she insisted, her eyes shining with enthusiasm.

Kim managed to withhold a grin. "There are quite a number of such legends, aren't there?" he asked chidingly. "What about the Martians who're supposed to live in the sands of the deserts and only dig their way out at night? And I seem to recall a number of old prospectors' tales of an asteroid where the rocks roll themselves around and talk to each other—"

"This is *not* an old prospector's tale!" she denied vehemently.

"It was considered to be just a—a fantastic story, when they first heard about it," Fran explained grimly. "That was fifteen years ago—no, twenty! Anyway, an old-time reptile hunter came stumbling into Venusport one day, half-dead with fungus fever. Before he died, he told about finding a tribe of frog-like savages up on the slopes of the Misty Mountains. A couple of hunters followed his trail back and found some tracks of strange, unknown creatures — like bear-tracks, their report said, only Venus hasn't any bears!

"Anyway, nobody really believed it, but Biochemical Research happened to have a teleologist named Thompson at Venusport."

"What's a teleologist?" Kim interjected.

"They specialize in organic adaptations. I've specialized in zoology the past few years, more so than biochemistry — especially mammalogy. Anyway, this Thompson set out to see what he could find. The tracks were washed away by then, of course, but—

"But Thompson never returned!

"Biochemical Research immediately sent out other investigators to organize search-parties for Thompson, and of course, to see what *they* could find. But none of them ever found anything! Not a trace!"

"So?"

Fran gave him a wide-eyed, triumphant smile. "So the Department sent me an ethergram after I notified them I was safe on Ceres. They asked me to return to Earth, if I could arrange passage, because they wanted me on the new expedition being outfitted for Venus.

"And they said one other thing

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I knew what it meant, instantly. They said: *'Thompson came back!'"*

The Man From Space.

GRADUALLY, their relationship grew less formal. Before the breakfast hour, Fran was usually locked in her stateroom; then, accidentally, she left the door standing open. As he was passing in the corridor, Kim glimpsed her sitting before the mirror in silken pajama shorts and jacket. Her face was smeared with creamy paste and her hair was twisted tautly into pin-curlers. Kim leaned weakly against the doorjamb, laughing. But from then on, the door was left open.

She cut his hair and let him cut hers—with the clipper-dome, it was easy—and alternated watches with him in the control pit. She borrowed an old pair of his shorts and jacket, and joined him in crawling through the ship's steel intestines, inspecting and repairing, cleaning and oiling. She assumed the role of ship's cook after he showed her a few culinary tricks with food concentrates. She helped him polish the quartzite ports and vacuum down the bunks and upholstery. She repainted the ship's galley.

They had hardly reached the half-way mark in their trajectory when she asked to use the ship's radio. Kim refused flatly.

They were seated in the control pit—Kim was in the seat and she had climbed down into his lap—when she hinted about it again.

She merely wanted to contact the Biochemical Research Department at Lunaport and tell them she was coming—and find out more about the expedition—

"You should've taken care of that before we left Ceres," Kim replied grimly. "The answer is no—the radio stays locked!"

A broadcast to Lunaport, he knew, would be as good as calling the Space Fleet and telling them he was on his way. All spacecraft ran on schedules registered with Earth—except deserter craft, like the *Voodoo*. Space Communications at Lunaport would take a vector reading on his transmitter as a matter of routine. Then they'd notify the Space Fleet. Any ship on an unscheduled course was, naturally, a deserter!

Fran tried pouting for about five seconds. It didn't work. Then, she treated him coolly. Their talk lapsed back into monosyllables. That didn't work, either. and Kim knew she was beginning to wonder.

He knew, too, when she stopped wondering. It was when he entered the turbine chamber on a routine inspection and found the film of grease scrubbed off the steel deck around the shiny, new stress-beam. He had installed the stress-beam at Ceresport.

And where the oil-film was scrubbed away, there was a long, jagged scar in the steel plates. It was the welding scar where the freighter's

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beam had burned a leak in the hull.

He walked back into the main salon to find her seated before one of the portholes, staring out at the sprinkled constellations of the stars. He saw her cringe slightly as he stepped out of the corridor, but she didn't look up.

He moved over to the liquor cabinet, got out a tumbler, and poured himself a stiff three fingers.

She gave a soft, brittle laugh. "It's —it's quite a coincidence, isn't it?" she stammered shakily. "I was— I helped them on the forward gun battery! I'm the one who — who got you with that beam, Kim!"

Then she rose and stalked swiftly to her stateroom. The door clicked shut with grim finality.

Kim stood staring after her and sipping his drink, silently.

He was standing late watch in the control pit when he heard her moving around, below. Pots clattered in the galley.

When he came down, she had dinner prepared. They seated themselves and ate without speaking. Then she put down her fork, sighed timorously, and looked up.

"I apologize for acting silly, Mr. Rothman," she said coldly. "I have no right to be that way. I've accepted your services, no questions asked—I should have been aware of the circumstances."

Kim pushed his plate aside, hardly having touched his food, took out his cigarettes, and drew one alight. He studied his hands absently. "You're quite right, Fran," he acquiesced.

She gave an angry grimace and hot tears glittered in her eyes for an instant. "But—whatever could make you do such a thing?" she demanded with a suddenly shrill voice.

Kim raised his brows in feigned indifference, leaned back, and blew a faint cloud of smoke at the wall. "Fortunes of war, I suppose—"

"War? *What* war? It's the 'fortunes' you're after, isn't it! I suppose you'd kill for money—"

He faced her, then, his face without expression. "No," he said softly. "Not for money, Fran. For the lives, the freedom of others, perhaps—"

Fran buried her face in her hands. "Lives? Freedom? Does that explain the attacks that have been made on so many space freighters going to Jupiter? The lives lost—"

"Those were corporation-owned freighters," Kim said coldly.

"Suppose they were?" She dropped her hands, glared at him accusingly. "Suppose the corporations of Earth do own and operate a few space freighters? The crews are better-paid, get better medical care! Or is it the corporations?"

"It is," Kim nodded.

"But *why*? They don't enslave their employees! They aren't exploiting the Jovian Moons, fighting each other—the Earth government doesn't allow such ruthless measures, on Earth or anywhere else! They'd lose their colonial rights if

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they ever tried that! This - - this isn't the Sixteenth Century!"

"If that were all we were concerned with, there'd be no pirating," Kim retorted firmly. "As it is, we aren't just pirates—we're privateers, paid by the free settlers of Mars and Venus! They get the loot of our raids!"

"Because you can out-bid Earth's prices?" she snapped hatefully. "That's how you make your 'fortunes,' isn't it?"

"Most of us are paid a flat fee per trip, Miss Freemont. We are not paid for the loot. We stop the freighters; crews from Mars or Venus board the freighters, capture them, and go home with them."

Fran stared at him, then shook her head. "I can't believe that, Kim," she said quietly. "That it's the free settlers of Mars or Venus who're really to blame? No, Kim —they could never get by without Earth—"

"No, they couldn't. But Earth has almost forced them to get by without her, charging them prices they can't pay!"

Her eyes narrowed contemptuously. "Do you realize a space credit is evaluated at one thousand dollars in Earth currency?"

"It's materials and machinery that make values," Kim said caustically. "Not figures on paper. But I didn't say the free settlers were altogether to blame. We spacemen were the ones who turned pirate!"

"Robbing the rich to give to the poor, I suppose!" she taunted.

"Attacking corporation-owned freighters because they spell the end for us!" Kim replied. "The crews of those freighters work for the corporations, not themselves—they're even being trained by the corporations, rather than the Space Academy—"

"That's reason enough to kill them?"

"They're a bunch of white-collar workers who jump only when they get the word from the main office!" Kim shouted. "They've proved, many times, that you can't make decisions in which settlers' lives are at stake from any plush office on Earth! If they were worth the title of spacemen, they'd have seen that the Mars' and Venus' settlers got their supplies from Earth whether they could pay for them or not!" He slammed his fist on the table and slumped back in his chair, scowling.

Fran sat perfectly still for a moment, then touched her napkin to her lips and rose. "I don't think there's any point in discussing this further," she said coolly. Then she walked to her stateroom. The door closed gently.

Kim smoked three cigarettes in rapid succession, then got up and steamed the dishes.

RELATIONS were rather strained, from then on. Fran kept mostly to her stateroom, coming out only to prepare meals.

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Kim told himself that he didn't care. And he didn't—about some things. He ate little, picking at his food. His hair grew long, bushy. A week's stubble of tough, black beard sprouted from his cheeks. He virtually shunned the large shower-room in the crew's quarters. His mouth twisted into a habitual scowl. He slept fitfully.

She came unexpectedly into the salon, one day, and stopped, her face turning bone-white.

He was standing at the other end of the salon, stripped to the waist, rolling his shoulders, flexing his arms, and whipping his guns from his holsters in blurred practice draws.

She turned slowly and walked out.

For a long while after she was gone, Kim stood staring after her. Then he took a flask from the liquor cabinet, retired to his bunk in the crew's quarters, and drank himself to sleep.

When they began nearing the proximity of Earth, he set up the Schmidt lens scope in the control pit and began taking observations of the planet. It was a giant blue sphere on the lens, a bright crescent of light and a dim blur of darkness. There were the brown patches of boiling equatorial deserts in Africa, Australia, and North America, the verdant green vegetation near the Poles. He studied the Mississippi and Amazon Bays in the Western Hemisphere, that once were peaceful farm-valleys, and the channels and lakes and ten-thousand islands in Central Russia. It was winter in the Northern Hemisphere, and there was a tiny patch of white in the Arctic Ocean, all that remained of the polar ice and the last great Ice Age, 14,000 years ago.

Earth had became quite a bit warmer since then.

Kim felt no affection for the planet. He had been to Earth only once, and then just to the great Sahara Spaceport. His interest was prompted solely by the fact that, like all planets, the Earth had a tendency to wobble about irratically on her orbit. A man coming in on a long trajectory could never be sure which side of the Equator he'd come down on.

But he left the Schmidt scope mounted in the control pit. And as he returned on his next watch, he found Fran peering into it. He wriggled past her and crawled down into his seat. Neither of them spoke. But Fran stayed.

The radio began to distinguish signals from star-noise soon after that. Kim spent long hours beside it with notepad and stylus, listening to messages and scribbling notations. It wasn't long before he knew there were six Space Fleet dreadnaughts swinging in orbit around the Moon, and their position and motion along that orbit. He plotted the trajectories of spaceliners and freighters plying between Earth and the Moon, and leaving and approaching those

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two bodies from the other planets. With that information, he plotted his own approach along a trajectory that would touch no radar fields, one that would bring the *Voodoo* safely down to Earth without being detected.

He opened the chart locker and dug out the Earth maps at dinner. "Where's the Chao-Tang estate?" he asked.

She pointed it out on the map of Asia, a spot on the slopes of the Khangai Mountains, just north of the Gobi plains. "There are large cattle and sheep ranches on the Gobi," she explained practically. "Large vineyards in the Valley of the Kara Nor. People are widely scattered and most of them wouldn't know a spaceship if they saw one. There are deep hardwood forests on the slopes of the Khangai, and only a few country estates and isolated lumber camps. You can hide the *Voodoo* easily in that country."

Kim nodded absently. "I'm more concerned with getting down there unnoticed. A sweep across the Indian Ocean and through Central China would seem the best bet—more cattle - industries in that jungle grassland—"

The Earth grew to a huge, swollen ball, steaming with dense atmosphere. It crept across the black emptiness of space and the *Voodoo*, like a tiny, invisible needle, hurtled toward it, vanished into it. . .

THE ravine was a deep, narrow gash in the hillside, with steep walls of ancient, crumbling rock. The *Voodoo* rested snugly in the bottom of it, with nothing to reveal her presence except a few blackened trees at the end of the ravine, seared by her force-screen as she slithered over them.

She had arrived at night. Now, it was morning. Fran's slim, lovely figure came scrambling up to the top of the ravine with breathless eagerness. She stood still, her hair blowing about her head and her scant garments molding against her body, staring out over the wide valley to a distant line of sheer bluffs. She laughed musically as Kim came stumbling up after her, straining muscles he seldom used.

Her face shone with radiant happiness as she skipped merrily ahead. The wind made a low, sweet sighing sound in the tall stands of hardwood timber that cloaked the surrounding hills. Leaves rustled and bushes whispered. Birds made weirdly beautiful sounds in the trees.

She stopped, laughing with sheer, bubbling joy, and looked back at Kim.

He stood at the top of the ravine, staring about with a strange puzzlement. This wasn't home, to him—it was a new, unknown planet. The blue dome of the sky seemed to shut him in; the puffy white clouds and the trees around him seemed fragile, somehow futile things. Only the worn, crumbling rock beneath his

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feet told him they were neither fragile nor futile. The beauty of the surroundings was strange to him; and being strange, seemed garishly ugly.

He stood darkly against the sky, a lost, lonely figure.

Fran turned and walked back to him.

"I know where I am, Kim," she said quietly. "It's only a few miles to a traffic lane. I can signal a ride from there on." She held out her hand, smiling wistfully. "I guess it's time for the lady and the pirate to—to say good-bye."

Kim gazed down at her, soberly. Then he grasped her small firm hand; shook it. She stood close to him for a moment, then gave a sad, little shake of her head, turned, and walked quickly off into the dark, frowning trees.

Kim watched her go, silently. Then a frown crossed his brows as he turned back to stare out over the valley.

There, miles away, on a neighboring slope where the timber stood thickly. He'd noticed it in the radar scope as they came down through the darkness, wondered if it were a natural formation.

Now he knew it wasn't. It was a mile-long streak through the dense trees, beginning with blackened tops and becoming black, naked trunks and finally a deep gash where the trees had been burned down to stumps.

Another spacecraft had landed on the slopes of the Khangai Mountains.

The Eagles Gather!

THERE was a dry gully between the trees. The blackened fireburn ran into the gully.

There was a man sitting on a rock at the top of the gully, holding a Chavez beam-rifle across his knees.

Kim loosened his guns in their holsters and stepped out of the dense brush, facing the sentry.

"Don't lift that Chavez!" he warned flatly.

The sentry started, gaped at him. Kim noted that the man wore the usual, nondescript shorts and jacket of a spaceman.

"My name's Rothman," he said. "Wind up that wrist-set you're wearing and tell your boss-man below I'm coming down for a talk."

"Huh?" the sentry grunted dumbly. "Oh! Yeah—sure!" He raised his left arm, flipped a stud on the tiny transceiver set strapped to his forearm, and spoke into the grid. "Jehupat calling from topside!"

"What is it, Jehupat?" a harsh, metallic voice spat back.

"Somebody named Rothman wants to see Black Dog!"

"Wait a minute!"

Kim's righthand gun was suddenly covering the startled sentry. "I don't just *want* to see him, bucko! I'm *going* to see him!"

Before the sentry could reply, the tiny radio spat again.

"It's okay, Jehupat! Let Roth-

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man come down!"

"Now, that's just fine!" Kim murmured softly. He walked past the sentry, turned, and glanced down into the gully.

It was just deep enough to hold the fat, blackened hulk of the refitted space freighter. Kim knew instantly that it was a pirate craft. Freighters were slow and clumsy, but the gun-batteries bristling from their turrets along the bulging flanks could equal the firepower of any Space Fleet dreadnaught.

He gave the tense, silent sentry a parting glance and started down the faint path that led to the freighter's airlock.

As he reached the bottom of the gully, he spotted the table and chairs that had been set up in the shadow of the steep clay bank, near the airlock. He studied the huge man seated behind the table, watching him.

The thick airlock portal stood open. The dark portholes along the ship's looming side revealed no glimpse of inner movement. The whole set-up stank, Kim thought. It was ominously silent.

The man at the table was a vision to behold! He had a segmentated flak helmet, looking like an oversized steel pineapple, on his head. He had thick, bushy black brows, a tremendous knob of a nose, and a great wealth of black beard. He was naked to the waist, built somewhat like an overgrown gorilla, and he wore scarlet shorts and shiny black boots. Moreover, there was a rich purple cloak thrown over one shoulder, and the cloak was decorated with a small, black human skull.

"Well!" the vision exclaimed, in a voice that boomed thunderously. "Mr. Kim Rothman, is it? Come, sit down!"

"Everybody knows me," Kim quipped in wry disgust.

"Proper introductions! Of course, of course—forthcoming!" the black beard boomed. "I am Captain Black Dog MacSneary!"

"Captain of what?" Kim asked in sweet innocence. He was glad he had his gun out, seeing the big .055 mm. Maxim pistol on the table.

"Captain, sir, of the good ship *Satanis!*" MacSneary announced. To prove his point, he turned and spat fondly on the blackened hull. "A blasted space pirate like yourself, sir!" he added with consumate pride. "The *only* space pirate who looks the part, damme, an' has *three* Second Officers to boot! They're covering you from the Number Three port turret, up there—a blonde, a brunette, and a readhead!"

"Well, goodness sakes!" Kim taunted, grinning. "I can hardly wait for the elephants!"

MacSneary's eyes squinted almost shut. "A bit more impertinence, Mr. Rothman, and you may even hear the calliope!"

"Let's cut the routine short, Mac," Kim retorted. "What're you doing around here?"

MacSneary gave a snaggle-toothed smile. "I have a captive chained be-

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lowdecks, Mr. Rothman! Picked him up a few days after you cleared Ceresport and came here with him, passing you on the way, I believe, and arriving first." He leaned back and tugged at his beard, chuckling. "The captive, sir, is Mr. Hiram Tucker, formerly First Officer of the freighter *Walrus*. Sound interesting?"

"Go on," Kim prompted.

"Mr. Hiram Tucker happens to be a third-generation native of the planet Venus," MacSneary obliged. "Twenty years ago, he was a close friend of a reptile hunter named Walter Tucker—no relation — who died, at that time, of fungus fever in Venusport. Intriguing?"

"Wouldn't be the reptile hunter who told of the froggish Venusians?" Kim asked thoughtfully.

MacSneary grinned. "You know perfectly well it was, Mr. Rothman! And I'm here to tell you you're not going to grab the sacred treasure of the Venusians if I can get at it first!"

"Treasure?" Kim's ears perked up.

"But of course! The treasure of deadly metal that no man could approach and live!" MacSneary spread his broad, powerful hands, conclusively. "The treasure old man Tucker babbled about before he died!"

"Hmmm!" Kim hummed, scratching his chin with the muzzle coil of his gun. "There's a treasure, is there?"

"Undoubtedly! That scientific chap, Thompson, has returned and bore out Tucker's tale of the Venusians! Why, then, shouldn't the part about the treasure be true?"

Kim stared at the pompous, old pirate. Then he holstered his gun, walked forward, grabbed a chair, and straddled it. "Mac, old boy," he chided, "you didn't come here just to tell me all these sweet nothings! Want a cut in the deal?"

"On the contrary," MacSneary retorted, "I shall cut the whole pie, thank you! At the moment, my dear fellow, my henchmen are out picking a ripe plum named Miss Frances Freemont whom you so graciously dropped into our midst. When they return, I shall contact Miss Freemont's relatives and ask them for the exact location of this tribe of Venusians in exchange for the young lady. I believe Mr. Wu Chao-Tang, Director of the Biochemical Research Department, will be happy to cooperate!"

Then he planted his big hands on the tabletop and leaned toward Kim. "My advice to you, sir," he said in a low, menacing grumble, "is to get out while you still have a whole skin!"

Kim rose to his feet, slowly. "Will you stand up for it?" he asked. "Or do you want it sitting down?"

MacSneary flashed his snaggle-toothed grin. "I perceive, sir, that I must show you my hand. There!" He gestured toward the looming, black hull.

Kim glanced upward, then froze. A steel plate had swung open in the hull, and three young girls stood braced in the opening. They each

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held a Chavez rifle centered directly on his chest. There was a blonde, a brunette, and a redhead, all attractive, all wearing pistols belted around their thighs and not a stitch of anything else.

"Three aces, Mr. Rothman!" MacSneary chortled.

Kim shrugged. "I guess you win the pot!"

"Thank you. Good day, Mr. Rothman. Have a pleasant journey!"

Kim turned and walked back up the faint, narrow path.

FRAN'S footsteps left a clear trail from the top of the ravine, where he'd left her. Kim followed in a dead run, branches and thorny brambles tearing at him mercilessly.

It was just possible that MacSneary had slipped up in arranging his time-table. Obviously, the old pirate had expected him to see the fire-burn, Kim concluded, and knew he would come to investigate. Thus, the men who were to kidnap Fran were watching the *Voodoo* when he and Fran emerged. Then they followed Fran until she was a safe distance away, beyond earshot. While they were doing that, Kim had moved swiftly—had spotted the fire-burn immediately, which MacSneary couldn't have expected him to do—had been early to reach the *Satanis*.

That left enough time for MacSneary's men to capture Fran; it didn't leave enough time for them to get half-way back with her!

Kim stumbled across the ravine, [illegible] rough treetrunk, and plunged onward. The trail wandered around the brow of a tall, frowning peak and zig-zagged down a steep incline. He stumbled again, lost his footing on the loose shale, sprawled on his face and rolled.

He climbed to his feet, cursing, and went on more cautiously.

They were at the bottom of the incline, starting up. There were three of them, young, sturdy lads. They wore skimpy loinstrings supported by belted guns at their thighs. And one of them was wearing Fran Freemont, draped over his brawny shoulder. She was trussed up, gagged, and no trouble at all.

Kim proved to be another matter.

He stepped out of the trees above them with a gun in each hand. He wasn't a welcome sight, nor a pleasant one. His wild beard and bristling hair were caked with dust, his garments were torn to shreds, and his body was creased with livid red welts and smeared with dirty sweat.

And the first thing he did was blow the legs out from under the young, sturdy lad carrying Fran, before she could be pulled down and used for a shield. The young lad fell into the boiling, blood-drenched dust and Fran fell on top of him. The young lad screamed in agony, a scream that tapered off into a moan of unconsciousness.

Kim spoke to the remaining two. "Lay down on your bellies and stretch your arms over your heads, [illegible] the same way he

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did!"

They complied hastily.

He walked over, jerked the guns from their holsters, and hurled them off into the brush. Then he dragged Fran off the bleeding, legless body and deposited her in the cool shade of a tree. Her eyes were glazed with terror. He ripped the gag from her mouth and slapped her lightly on each cheek. He nodded in satisfaction as each cheek showed a spot of color, then returned to business.

"Pick up your colleague, gentlemen," he ordered to two prostrate men, "and carry him back to MacSneary with my compliments. Tell him he has exactly one hour to leave Earth."

Again, the results were swift. The two men, and half another, scrambled up the steep incline.

Kim untied Fran and began massaging her wrists and ankles, warming the circulation back into them. "We've got to get back to the *Voodoo,*" he said quietly. "Think you can make it?"

"I—don't know," she mumbled through stiff lips. "They—*kidnapped* —me!"

"We were followed from Ceres by a character named MacSneary," he explained briefly. "He'll no doubt stop at nothing to get his hands on you. Kidnapping's the only way he could get what he wants, with no trouble from the Space Fleet or the Earth police."

"What—what'll we do?"

"Get back to the *Voodoo!*"

"F-fight them?"

Kim shook his head and stood up. "They out-gun us. C'mon."

"B-but what—" She gasped dizzily as he hauled her up to her feet.

"We'll radio the Space Fleet," he said grimly.

She took a stumbling step, then grabbed at him, staring up at him. "But—but that means you will—"

"No time for regrets, Fran. *Start walking!*"

IT took only a General Distress call to arouse the Space Fleet dreadnaughts out near the Moon. Kim gave them a terse description of the *Satanis* and her armaments, her position and probable intentions; he broke connections when the Space Fleet operative demanded identification. *That cooks my goose!* he thought grimly.

But Fran apparently had different ideas. She pushed him, retuned the ship's radio, and began calling into the mike. "Francis Freemont calling Chao-Tang! Francis Freemont to Chao-Tang! Can you hear me?"

And the radio speaker blared back, clearly: "Chao-Tang to Miss Freemont, we hear you most definitely. Decrease your modulation please."

Minutes later, a sleek, teardrop craft came skimming over the *Voodoo* on whistling rotar-blades.

"Come on!" Fran prompted, tugging at Kim's arm. "You were willing to give up everything for me—and I'm not leaving you here for the Space Fleet!"

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He stumbled after her in a daze, as grasped by eager hands that ulled him into a cool, cushioned in-erior. He felt Fran's soft, warm ody crowd in beside him, then the oor tilted and they were rising.

Shock and fatigue crept through im like a stealthy cloud of black nconsciousness. Just before it rolled p over his eyes, he caught a glimpse rough a transparent roof of the lean, blue sky. Tiny specks were ircling downward—swift, powerful ttle Fleet scout cruisers—

The eagles were gathering!

HE woke up between crisp, white sheets. Cool salve covered his elts and scratches. His cheeks were mooth, clean-shaven. His whole be-ng felt listless. His nerves were ulled.

Had he passed out? *That* had nev-r happened before!

The walls of the room were dark lue. The ceiling had thick, glossy eams of rich mahogany. The win-ow was a large, arabesque opening n his right, looking out on green reetops and blue mountains in the listance. The door was a low, nar-ow slot—

A small, brown head poked in hrough the door, then withdrew be-ore he could catch more than a glimpse of it. There was a soft augh.

A moment later, a tall, slender Oriental came in. As he walked over o the bed, Kim realized that the ed was resting flat against the floor.

The man had tilted eyes, tawny skin, and a white goatee. He was old, but husky, well-muscled. There was a black skullcap on his bald head and a blue silken robe fell to his ankles.

"I see you're among us again, Mr. Rothman," he said calmly. "Permit me to intoduce myself: I am Yin Chao-Tang."

"Where's Fran?" Kim asked. He was surprised at his weak, grating voice.

"Miss Freemont is resting," Yin replied. "She would not leave your side until we had assured her thoroughly that you were beyond the crisis." There was a faint humor in his tones.

"Crisis?" Kim rasped.

"You have been ill." Smiling, Yin stepped over to a low seat and eased himself into it, cross-legged. "With all that exertion, you were weakened and fell victim to mountain fever, Mr. Rothman. It's a local virus infection."

Kim's eyes widened. "No—immunity!" he gasped.

Yin nodded. "Having spent your life in the controlled environment of spacecraft and domed cities, you had not developed immunity to such a disease. You were struck down rather swiftly. It was fortunate that we could give you treatment immediately, or it would have been fatal!"

Kim laughed shakily. "Should have known—always clear through Medical before visiting a planet—"

"You should have medical examinations and innoculation against a

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new planet's diseases," Yin agreed. "Most people new to this region contract our mountain fever; it causes them to sneeze. But you were helpless against it. Immediate treatment saved you from a serious attack."

Kim stared at the ceiling. His breathing was shallow. Hunger gnawed at his stomach. "How long?" he rasped.

"Four days and five nights," Yin answered readily. "This is the morning of the fifth day. Miss Freemont did not sleep for four nights."

Another robed figure came through the door. A slender girl with coal black hair and blue eyes, wearing a scarlet robe that sheathed her in shimmering flame. She carried a bowl on a tray.

"Your broth has arrived," Yin announced, rising. "Eat, then rest, Mr. Rothman. We shall talk later."

THE next morning, Kim rose, bathed, and dressed himself in the silken blouse and slacks laid out for him. The slender girl led him out on a sunlit terrace and brought him a breakfast fit for three men. He polished it off, neatly.

He settled back contentedly over coffee and cigarettes. There was a comforting view of dark, timber-clad mountains and rolling, green slopes of vineyards and the silvery ribbon of a small stream. He had gradually grown accustomed to the scenery, had begun to feel appreciation for its strange, peaceful beauty.

He was in an excellent mood for what came next.

A slender figure materialized in the wide doorway opening out on the terrace.

"Kim!" Fran cried. Then she dashed out and threw her arms around him and clamped her lips on his.

Kim untangled himself somewhat dazedly. "—Um—uh—good morning!" he said, placing his cigarette carefully on the ashtray. Then, somehow, he got tangled up again.

Fran laughingly struggled up out of his lap and stood staring down at him with bright, shining eyes. "My!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "You've certainly got your strength back!"

"Strong constitution!" Kim grinned devilishly. "Step back and do a slow turn, once, so I can see that —that thing you're wearing!"

"Would you *believe* it? Earth fashions changed in just the *short time* I was away!"

She moved back with an impish grin, raised her arms, and did a slow pirouette before him. Kim whistled his admiration of her natural attributes, but her costume made him want to laugh. It was a bright green one-piece tunic, but it was transparent—she wore a black G-string under it, and there were little black dragons embroidered across the top.

Fran pouted at his derisive chuckle. "Well, it's what they're *wearing!"* she protested.

Kim looked vaguely puzzled. "What's *who's* wearing?"

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"The—oh, you wouldn't understand—"

"I'm going to have breakfast!" she announced with a pert toss of her head. "But you're going in to have a talk with Uncle Yin!"

"Um?" He looked up, startled. "Did I do something?"

She frowned irritably. "You haven't—*done* anything, dear! It's just that Uncle Yin wants to *talk* to you!"

"But I'd rather talk to you, first! I'll see him later."

"Kim—" She slumped into the chair across from him. "Don't be difficult," she pleaded. "Just do as I say—please! You'll find Uncle Yin in the study. Mei Ching will show you the way. Mei!" She clapped her hands, lightly.

The servant girl came gliding out the doorway.

"Show Mr. Rothman to the study," Fran commanded.

"Well, la-de-dah!" Kim exclaimed. He rose, kicking his chair back. "Very well, your highness! I'll go settle old Uncle Yin's hash for you."

Fran looked shocked and hurt as he strode away.

THE study was a long, low room in deep shadow. It had book-lined walls, narrow windows, and heavy teakwood furniture. Electric coals glowed bluishly in a small brazier, illuminating the tall figure with the white goatee who sat behind the massive table. Yin was garbed in a full-length black robe.

Kim stopped on the other side of the room when he saw his two Maxim guns, with belt and holsters, lying on the table before the old man. Then he approached, slowly. The guns were out of their holsters, their butts placed toward him.

This was it, then. The Chao-Tang family had taken him in and nursed him for Fran's sake. Now, it was a different matter. And he was a pirate.

Kim reached the table and picked up his guns, checking their gauges in the butt-plates. They were fully charged.

He slipped them into their holsters, then picked up the belt and buckled it about his hips. Old Yin Chao-Tang didn't move a muscle.

Kim faced him, squarely. "I want facts," he demanded. "What happened to Black Dog MacSneary?"

Yin raised a boney hand, protestingly. "It is as I suspected," he intoned. "You are accustomed to taking what you want!"

"An oblique answer if I ever heard one!" Kim retorted. "I make my demands within reason, old man—the fellow who doesn't usually gets his head blown off! Now, what happened to MacSneary?"

Yin gave a sigh of resignation. "Very well, Mr. Rothman. But I must warn you that Miss Freemont will not be considered a reasonable demand. As for the pirate, MacSneary, I believe he anticipated your actions!"

"Miss Freemont has a mind of

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her own, hasn't she?" Kim snapped angrily. "And I asked for facts, not your opinion!"

"My apologies!" Yin ducked his head in a bow. "Miss Freemont is free to make her own decisions, of course. But first, you must win her favor, Mr. Rothman. You will not find that easy! And if you try to take her by force, the family of Chao-Tang shall not rest until you are dead!"

"So *that's* it!" Kim exploded. "You crazy old fool, for that alone I ought to kill you!"

Yin drew back in alarm. "Mr. Rothman! I must remind you that this is the house of Chao-Tang!"

"That wouldn't make you less dead!" Kim replied grimly. "But we'll skip that, for the present. Let's hear those facts!"

"Of course," Yin said stiffly. "We had best ignore the proprieties of the East. The pirate, MacSneary, gathered his crew into his spacecraft and shot straight up, smashing through the cover of the Space Fleet ships. The atmospheric resistance tore many pieces from his craft, including some gun-batteries. The Space Fleet caught up with it in space, but there were only a few persons left on it. The life boat had broken free with the others, and vanished."

"Uh huh!" Kim grunted thoughtfully. "He knew I was calling in the Space Fleet, all right! But he wouldn't have bothered with Tucker—" Kim gazed down at Yin, sharply. "Was there a Hiram Tucker, First Officer of the *Walrus,* left on Mac Sneary's ship?"

Yin shook his head. "The Space Fleet reported no such captive."

Kim swore mirthfully. "Bluffing! That old devil—" He paced the room chuckling to himself, then turned on his heel to face Yin. "What did you tell the Space Fleet?"

"Miss Freemont informed the Space Fleet commander that she had come here from Ceres in your deserter craft, the *Voodoo,* and that those other pirates had followed her," Yin answered glumly. "The Space Fleet commander assumed that someone with MacSneary owned the *Voodoo* and gave chase to recapture it. No mention was made of you."

"And the *Voodoo?*"

"It was confiscated by the Space Fleet, of course!"

Kim scowled darkly. Loss of the *Voodoo* left him marooned here on Earth — a known criminal, a deserter!

"And now," Yin spoke with sudden vigor, "it is my turn to demand facts, Mr. Rothman! Why did the pirate, MacSneary, follow you and Miss Freemont to Earth?"

Kim stared at him, for a moment. That little matter had been completely forgotten!

Then Kim smiled, grimly. "Yin Chao-Tang," he said, in a soft, pleasant tone, "I'm glad you asked me that question!"

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The Legend of Venus.

"SO you can see where that leaves you, gentlemen!" Kim concluded his explanation. "With this Hiram Tucker wagging his tongue all over Ceresport, that yarn about the Venusians' treasure will spread like wildfire! Every thief, pirate, murderer and adventurer in the Solar System will be racing with your expedition to find the Venusians, and fighting you every step of the way!"

In the dark study with him was Yin, seated in a tall, straight-backed chair beside him. They faced a portion of the wall where a bookcase had been slid aside, revealing a giant television screen. On the screen, in color, was a large desk and the back wall of an office, with a window opening on the slender towers of Manhattan Center, seat of the Earth government.

Wu Chao-Tang, Director of the Biochemical Research Department, was seated behind the desk. His image on the screen was vastly different from his brother, Yin, in appearance. Wu Chao-Tang was short of stature; his muscular torso was squat and powerful. He had a fuzz of white hair on the top of his head and was dressed in modern jacket and slacks of blue plastisilk.

He smiled with a grim, tight-lipped humor. "I'm afraid you're right, Mr. Rothman," he said crisply. "It also occurs to me that you're a man we must deal with these individuals you mentioned."

"There is only one way you *can* deal with them," Kim answered flatly. "You've got to strike first, before they do—and strike swiftly!"

Yin stirred irritably in his chair. "Learned brother," he addressed the screen, "I would hardly deem it advisable for us to accept the philosophies of—"

"Quiet, Yin!" Wu Chao-Tang snapped curly. "There is only one reason you are always left at home, my esteemed brother. It is where you belong!"

He switched his gaze to Kim and smiled dourly. "Excuse the family squabbles, Mr. Rothman. Yin's always losing face! As for the expedition—" He paused, reflectively. "It's hardly a situation any group of scientists are endowed to cope with! I hesitate, now, to allow Miss Freemont to accompany them—"

"I think that's a wise decision," Kim observed, nodding.

"On the other hand," Wu continued, with a faint grin, "she is certified as a Second Officer! Suppose we signed you on as First Officer, Mr. Rothman?"

"The Space Fleet would pick me up as soon as they heard about it," Kim reminded him.

Wu chuckled mischievously. "In an emergency like this, I believe we could provide you with a set of false credentials—with another name, of course! What would you suggest?"

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"Make it Rogers," he decided. It was enough like his own name to be easily remembered.

Wu nodded. "Very well, Kim Rogers! A courier will arrive with the proper credentials for you within the next twelve hours. You and Miss Freemont will then report to me, here!"

It was Kim's turn to nod. "We'll do that," he agreed.

"Good! I'll see you then." Wu smiled, touched a button on the desk, and—the screen went blank.

Kim turned toward Yin, speculatively. "Tell Miss Freemont —" he began.

But Yin was gone. The chair was empty.

"I KNOW, Kim," Fran said later. "Uncle Yin told me."

She turned away as Kim approached her. Kim snorted in exasperation, whirled, and stamped out of her room. He roamed around the big house and out through the surrounding gardens, muttering to himself about "civilization" and spoiled females.

A courier in a natty blue uniform showed up that night, handed Kim a sealed packet, and departed. Kim opened the packet and examined the credentials of "Kim Rogers," finding them quite satisfactory. He even had a special Government Permit to go armed!

Dinner was served through a strained silence, with Kim, Fran, and Uncle Yin seated well apart at the long table and chewing through gloom-filled worlds of their own.

Afterward, Fran tapped his shoulder in the corridor. "Come on," she said. "We're leaving now."

She led him outside and through the moonlit gardens, walking briskly, and down the hill to a large hangar at the end of a long, hard-surfaced airstrip. A gang of mechanics was pushing a sleek jet plane out of the hangar.

Fran vanished up the entrance hatch and Kim crawled gingerly after her. He found her strapping herself into the seat behind the controls, wriggled into the adjoining seat in the small, pressurized cabin, and cast a doubtful frown through the plexiglass bubble at the plane's thin, swept-back wings and ram-jet pods.

"You sure this thing'll fly?" he asked.

"Buckle your seatstraps!" she replied tersly.

"Uh huh!" he grunted. "You'd think these great Earth scientists would develop gravplates small enough for aircraft!"

Fran pressed her lips together tightly and slapped the starting switches. The plane trembled; she shoved open the throttles; and they hurtled forward with a swooshing roar.

Minutes later, Kim glumly conceded that the contraption would stay up. Fran handled the controls with a cool precision that won his grudging admiration.

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"Got a cigarette?" she asked.

He dug them out, handed one to her, and puffed one alight himself. Lump mountains and green valleys speckled with tiny houses slid past below.

"You didn't do too well, Kim," Fran remarked. "I was rather disappointed in you."

Kim stared at her, blankly. "Uncle Yin?" he asked.

"Yes." She spoke in a calm, detached tone. "He's a favorite of mine."

"Uh huh!" Kim sighed. "Guess I'm just a bull in the China shop!"

"You almost sound proud of it!"

"Could be I am!" He scowled grimly. "What's so hot about Uncle Yin, anyway?"

"Why—he's so quaint, so Oriental!" she spoke protestingly. "I think he's a darling!"

Kim loosened his straps and twisted around so he was facing her. "Tell me something," he said. "Have you ever heard anyone say anything about Uncle Yin being his mother's favorite?"

Fran started visibly. "W-why, I think — yes! How did you know that?"

"It's a trait," Kim muttered. "Things like that are noticed quickly, out where I live!"

"You mean he's a sissy?" Fran shook her head. "He's nothing of the kind, Kim! You don't know—"

"I didn't say he was, did I?" Kim cut her short.

"Then what *do* you mean?" she demanded.

Kim puffed on his cigarette, breathed smoke through his nostrils, and turned away. "You wouldn't understand," he said.

She turned her head to look at him, then. "You'll never change, then, will you?" she murmured softly.

It was an rrelevant question; Kim ignored it.

THEY flew northward swiftly, swinging up over the Arctic Ocean. Other planes registered from time to time on their radar scope, and went flashing past trailing a ribbon of white vapor. The sky grew dark and the stars twinkled out. Kim immediately began to feel more at home. Below, there were bright splashes of light where great industrial cities lifted their towering spires from the squat masses of atomic plants. Later, Fran looked down at the small, floating ice-field.

"Did you ever notice that the blue-and-white symbol of the Earth government doesn't match the contours of Earth's continents?" she asked, musingly. "It's the old United Nations' symbol!"

"It's fairly close, isn't it?" Kim responded.

She shook her head, smiling. "Just in general outline. It was designed before the polar ice melted, you see —that raised the sea-level of the oceans!"

Kim sighed indifferently and settled himself down to grab some

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sleep.

He awoke as they came skimming down onto a broad airfield. Tall towers loomed in the background, glowing softly in the early morning twilight. The plane's tires kissed the concrete and they rolled smoothly along the runway.

"New York Air Terminal," Fran explained. "A Department agent is waiting to escort us to our hotel. We're just in time for breakfast!" She applied the wheel-brakes, deftly. The plane swung into a parking area.

A sleek, glass-topped car whisked them across a long causeway from the brown coastline of the Catskill cliffs to the man-made island of Manhattan Center. Entering the Center, they strolled along moving walkways on broad boulevards between the huge, pastel colored towers. Fountains tossed their spray in tropical gardens beneath stately palm trees.

There were few people on the streets at that early hour. Men hurried along, wearing the modern, loose jackets and slacks of brght plastisilk. Young women, like Fran, wore the thin tunics and G-strings. Elderly women were richly gowned.

Transparent roofs enclosed the streets; there was a faint, steady breeze from circulation fans. Subterranean traffic murmured beneath their feet.

Kim felt a sneaking tremor of fear, as though the flat, towering walls were closing in on him. It left him pale and miserable.

"I been sick!" he quipped wryly."

Fran turned. "What?"

"Nothing."

They registered at a hotel and the uniformed, young agent who had guided them departed with a kindly grin. They had breakfast in a flowery, glass-enclosed nook, with soft music humming in the background. A robot trundled up to their table with a portable televiewer as they were having their last cup of coffee. It was Wu Chao-Tang; he wanted to see Kim Rogers at his office, immediately. Fran needed her beauty-nap, she said apologetically.

Kim stalked out alone, swung aboard one of the moving walkways, and sneered at the mighty metropolis. He'd take Level Nine any day! His walk was slowed to a few steps at a time as the walkways became crammed with people. His fear came back, for an instant. It was a greater mass of humanity than he had ever seen in his life—what must it be like in those industrial cities on the Arctic?

He looked at the individual towers, read the street-labels at the corners, and found his way to Wu Chao-Tang's office as easily as if he were charting his way around the Sun.

"You look unhappy, Mr.—ah—Rogers!" Wu exclaimed jovially, waving a hand that clutched a fat cigar toward the nearby chair.

"Guess I'm a savage," Kim replied, grinning. "Uncivilized." He sprawled into the proferred chair and took out a cigarette.

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Wu smiled quietly. "History repeats itself, I suppose. Once, a cultured gentleman of the early American colonies wrote a letter to a friend, describing a visit paid to him by a backwoodsman of those times—are you familiar with history, Mr. Rogers?"

Kim's grin broadened. "If I remember it correctly, the gentleman asked the backwoodsman to be seated; and the backwoodsman complied seating himself cross-legged on the floor. The gentleman protested and finally persuaded the buckskin-clad huntsman to sit in a chair. The backwoodsman kept fidgetting, fearing the contraption would collapse under him!"

Wu nodded. "You, sir, are a modern backwoodsman!" He rose, paced around his large, streamlined desk, and approached the broad window looking out on Manhattan Center. "Three million people down there never heard of you, Kim!" he added musingly.

Kim arched a querilous eyebrow. "Do I seem worried?"

"You wouldn't be; not you, Kim. There are five billion people on this Earth, living in their country homes and commuting by air to their jobs in the commercial centers. They have a high standard of living, thanks to atomic power—even though we haven't really harnessed it, yet! We've just converted its heat to steam, to kinetic power, to electricity. We still use plutonium processed

Kim shifted uneasily. "What are you driving at?" he asked in a guarded, wary tone.

Wu swung around, chuckling. "There are only a half-billion souls out on the other planets, Kim! We five billions want the uranium of those worlds; your half-billion wants machinery, supplies. We charge high for it."

"Too high!" Kim said curtly.

Wu walked back to his desk. "Yes," he agreed. "Too high. I can sympathize with that, Kim. But I'm only one of a few who know the conditions out there—one of a few, mind you, in five billions!"

"So five billion people could be wrong!"

"True, unfortunately." Wu nodded. "And so, you are a pirate!"

"True!" Kim mimicked mirthfully. "Unfortunately." He blew a perfect smoke-ring and peered across the desk at the stocky Oriental. "Which leads up to what?"

"The people of Venus," Wu said gently.

Kim's eyebrow went up, again.

"The *people* of Venus," Wu repeated with emphasis. "The natives, the Venusians, the natural inhabitants of that planet! If there are Venusians, Kim, why not Martians? How do we know? Neither of those planets has been even half-explored, yet!"

"So?" Kim prompted.

"So the latest reports from Venus-port tell of rumors that the free [illegible] revolution

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there!" Wu replied gravely. "A revolution, Kim, to win the planet for themselves — the planet that doesn't even belong to them! And our own experts, here, are talking of the necessity of Earthmen migrating to those planets, to keep Earth from becoming overpopulated! Three million of us are healthy centenarians, Kim!"

Kim pursed his lips, musingly. "Looks like a rough time for the Venusians!"

"And for us!" Wu amended softly. "The Venusians have atomic power, too!"

"Huh?" Kim jerked erect.

"Their 'sacred treasure' is a metal that glows with death," Wu said. "Anyone who approaches it is killed. None of the radioisotopes known to us can do that, Kim! We've always believed anything pouring out that much hard radiation would also release such intense heat that a man would be burned to a husk before any radioactivity could kill him!"

Kim rubbed his chin, speculatively. "You're a biochemist, Mr. Chao-Tang—"

"And a geologist. The two fields are related in interplanetary studies."

"Have you asked a nuclear physicist about this Venusian treasure?"

Wu nodded. "Our most eminent physicists doubt if it exists at all. But Walter Tucker and DuBois Thompson said it did. They both died."

"Thompson — your investigator — died? I thought he was missing for twenty years—"

"And reappeared at Venusport two months ago, almost dead with fungus fever. He left a hand-written report. The medical examination revealed that his tongue had been cut out fifteen or twenty years ago!"

"And this hand-written report?"

"Corroborated Tucker's earlier account in almost all details—the valley in the clouds, the temple, the village—"

"Who cut his tongue out?"

"Thompson called them 'the Toad men' . . . "

"And gave their location?"

"Yes. That's where our expedition is going." He went back behind his desk and sat down. "We may find nothing. It may be that there are no Venusians, that Thompson wandered half-crazed in the wilds of Venus for twenty years. But we've got to make sure!"

"And if there are Venusians?"

"Then there are quite likely Martians," Wu replied. "And our invasion of their planets will result in colonial and, quite probably, interplanetary wars which could erase all life from the Solar System!"

The Cruise of the Eohippus

THE signal-gong chiming for Change-of Watch stirred Kim out of a deep, fitful slumber. He rolled out of his bunk, showered, and dressed. His face was hollow-eyed and grim in the lavatory mirror as he trimmed his short, bristling

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beard.

Their three-weeks' cruise to Venus was becoming, in his considered opinion, a cruise of pure hell.

It had begun as soon as he stepped aboard the *Eohippus* as her First Officer. Wu Chao-Tang had come along to introduce him to Dr. Grogor Dimitrios, eminent biochemist-archaeologist, who was to be in charge of the expedition on Venus.

Dimitrios was a tall, handsome man with a beauifully muscled body—he wore skin-tight plastisilk coveralls that displayed his torso to best advantage. His coal-black hair was slicked back and his cold, dark eyes viewed Kim with contempt. Kim had known immediately that he'd made a mistake.

Earlier, he had told Wu, "I think the members of the expedition ought to be told my real identity and why I'm going along on the trip. MacSneary's still alive, and is bound to head straight for Venusport. He'll see that the Space Fleet officials there know about me as soon as I arrive, and the expedition members will learn about it anyway."

"And what will you do about the Space Fleet officials?" Wu asked.

Kim shook his head, grinning. "They won't bother me in Venusport. The free settlers would mob 'em if they bothered a space pirate!"

So Dimitrios knew who he was, when Wu introduced them aboard the *Eohippus*. Dimitrios was a cold, logical scientist. He came straight to the point. "First," he said, "all weapons shall be locked in the ship's armory except the Maxim pistol which I shall carry! Second, Mr. Rothman or Rogers, you may be First Officer aboard this ship, but you had best remember that I am in complete charge of this expedition and what dealings it may have with the Venusians! Is that understood?"

Kim eyed him, gravely. "First," he replied in a soft, subtle tone, "I'd kill a few people before I ever surrendered my guns, and you're a fool to think otherwise—"

"Mr. Chao-Tang!" Dimitrios protested, turning to Wu.

"Dig your own grave!" Wu told him, smiling.

"Second," Kim went on, firmly," I fully concede that you are in charge of this expedition. You're a scientist, Dr. Dimitrios, and you should have better knowledge of how to deal with any intelligent alien beings, such as the Venusians!"

Dimitrious was flustered. "Why—uh—I hadn't thought you'd see that, Rogers! Perhaps I've underestimated you!" His tone of surprised apology belied the hard anger that flared in his eyes. Dimitrios didn't like being made to appear ridiculous by a space pirate.

"And we'll forget about my guns," Kim told him, flatly.

"Of course!" The scientist turned on his heel and walked off.

That had been the first incident.

Examining the ship's log, Kim learned vaguely that an eohippus was either a South American beetle

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or a dawn-age horse or a species of Venusian fungus-tree; the geologists hadn't agreed which it was. He also learned that the good ship *Eohippus* was very weak in the power department.

She was a flat-bottomed, ugly-looking craft with rocket jets sprouting all over her nose, belly, and tail; she had a powerful radar and a souped-up force-screen, all of which was necessary for a ship that went plunging into the dense cloud-blanket over an unknown sector of Venus. Her grav-plates were also up to par. But for all this extra junk, she had only three hundred-thousand-horsepower atomic turbines.

Kim raised hell with the Spaceport Maintenance director until he got two extra turbines. Then Dimitrios tried to stop him from installing the turbines—that space was needed for extra equipment and instruments! Dimitrios threatened to call the Spaceport Guards.

Kim replied levelly that any Guards Dimitrios called would be killed, and the expedition would never leave Earth. Then he installed the turbines.

That not only made him less popular with Dimitrios, but prejudiced the rest of the expedition's members against him.

Fran remained friendly, if aloof; Kim was grateful for that. But it had hardly lasted through the first week of the trip.

Kim gulped down a scalding cup of coffee in the ship's galley and kicked his way up through the free-fall tube to the control bridge. It had been tough on Fran, he admitted, to remain friendly toward him, talking with him as they shared the Mid-Watch, dining with him in the ship's salon, chattering away with bright, feminine enthusiasm as they crawled through the ship's working innards on routine inspections. It had been tough because the others maintained a sullen silence in Kim's presence, shunned him whenever they could, gathered themselves around Dimitrios' imposing figure down on the passenger deck.

And Dimitrios had the figure to arouse any woman's interest. Also, he was a gentleman of culture and good tastes, with an exciting career both as an explorer and a scientist. On Earth, he was famous.

Gradually, Fran had become more and more civil toward Kim. Se had begun to notice that the others were including her in their social boycott. For a woman, that was painful.

For Kim, it had been mildly satisfying.

HE swung lithely out of the tube and planted his feet on the grav-plated deck of the dark, silent bridge. Veils of glittering stars hung in the blackness above the transparent blister, flooding a milky glow down through it to etch the bridge in dim light and stygian shadow. Up forward, the silhouette of Fran's

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head and shoulders was outlined sharply against the ruddy glare of signal-lights on the control bank. Kim strolled toward her, glancing casually to either side where auxiliary instrument panels registered the functioning of the ship's mechanisms. Everything seemed shipshape—that, at least, hadn't troubled him, so far—

Fran glanced around as his light tread sounded on the deckplates behind her. The glare from the control bank illuminated her smooth cheek and slender throat, struck greenish highlights in her auburn hair. Kim felt a trembling urge to touch that soft hair, to kiss the smooth column of her throat—he stopped, clenched his fists tightly.

She stared back at him, a tall figure in rumpled jacket and slacks, standing in the starlight. "You're two minutes early!" she announced coldly.

Kim shrugged and moved up behind her. "I'll take over, anyway. All readings check?"

"Check as computed," she answered. "There's a twentieth-place drift off course, but we can correct for that on our approach curve. Velocity increase is according to computed Solar drag. All circuits are clear." She rose gracefully from the acceleration chair, her slender slim body outlined revealingly through her thin tunic. "Shall I return for the Mid-Watch, or will you take it?"

"I'll take it, I guess," Kim said wearily, moving over to his own chair between the computor console and grid-table. "You needn't bother."

"Thanks." Fran bit the word out. "I'd rather listen to one of Dr. Dimitrios' discussions down on the passenger deck, anyway."

Kim sprawled into his chair, smiling grimly. "They're quite educational, I hear!"

"Very!" Fran grabbed up her pocketbook and belted it around her slim waist with quick, hurried movements. "I've — I've been thinking, too, Kim!" she stammered with a sudden breathlessness. "I think we should ask Dr. Dimitrios to pick up another team of officers at Venusport! I don't want to be Second Officer on the return trip. The way things are, we—we can't work together, Kim!"

"I hadn't intended to make the return trip, myself, anyway!" Kim retorted in rising anger. "I'd be a fool to go back to Earth!"

Fran stood frozen, staring at him, for a moment. "Oh!" she exclaimed softly. "I see! Of course, you saw no reason to mention that—"

"No need to!" Kim looked up at her, critically. "Wu Chao-Tang knew it without being told," he added.

A strange, twisted little smile touched Fran's face in the starlight. She fumbled in her pocketbook, then held a folded sheet of notepaper out to him. "I was going to mention it," she said. "We received a message from Earth a

FREE READ TO MEMBERS
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couple of hours ago. I think you'll be interested!"

Kim's brows raised as he reached out and accepted the note. Fran swung on her tiny, spiked heel and strode back to the free-fall tube. Kim paused, watching her swing her trim figure into the tube, then flipped on the grid-table light and unfolded the small square of paper. The message was neatly inscribed in the space-frequency-receiver's small, compact type:

> Wu Chao-Tang, Director of Biochemical Research Dept. Space Comm-station, Lunaport; Sahara Spaceport, Earth. Kim Rogers, First Officer *Eohippus*, enroute Venus, 43099.6-D
>
> To Rogers: Brother Yin Chao-Tang disappeared from Kanghai home shortly after you left there. Have just learned that Yin purchased scout cruiser *Voodoo* from government salvage with family funds, loaded provisions aboard, and blasted off for Venus. Suspect foolish brother wants sacred treasure of Venusians to save Oriental face. Do not trust him. If you see him, give him this message: if I ever see him again, I shall make him suffer for this dishonorable conduct.
>
> Respectfully, Wu Chao-Tang; Manhattan Center, Earth, NW.

Kim refolded the message, slowly, and slipped it into his belt. He realized bitterly that Fran was blaming him for Yin's actions . . .

The radar scopes came to life with a clamoring of alarm-gongs, just three hours later. Kim threw the Nuclear Journal he'd been reading aside and whirled to the glowering scopes.

The next instant, the ship's radio buzzed raspingly with a General Distress call.

THE alarm-gongs brought Fran, Dr. Dimitrios, and the other members of the expedition — fourteen men and nine women, some of them sleepy-eyed and half-dressed— crowding onto the bridge. All of them exhibited a morbid fright induced by the uneasiness that had been growing among them.

Kim knew they instintively distrusted him; he didn't exactly trust most of them, either. He didn't bother to look up as they came crowding around him, ignored them completely as he leaned toward the ship's radio panel, tuning its knobs and dials and chanting monotonously into the microphone: "Rogers of the *Eohippus* calling distressed lifeboat! Can you hear me? Rogers of the *Eohippus* calling distressed lifeboat—"

Dimitrios shoved forward through the babbling crowd and grabbed Kim's shoulder. "What is it, man?" he demanded. "What is it?"

Kim shrugged off his grasp and stared up at him. "A lifeboat swung in to intercept us on a collision orbit," Kim's voice was dry, emotionless. "They gave a General Distress call and cut off. I can't raise them."

"You mean they're adrift?" Fran cried anxiously. "Decelerate, then. We've got to pick them up!"

"I can't raise them," Kim repeated. "They won't answer."

"Probably they *can't* answer!"

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ıe retorted shrilly. "Their power robably ran out! They must be ictims of a pirate attack—I know hat that's like, Kim! *If you don't :op this ship, I—"*

She was already moving toward er chair, up forward, when Kim's ry tones stopped her. "The con-:ols are already set to decelerate," e said, turning back to the radio. We'll coordinate with them in wenty-seven minutes. I want you to emain here on the bridge and stand y while I board them." He looked p at Dimitrios, again. "Better un-ock the ship's armory and issue veapons!"

"Why should I?" the tall scient-st snapped. "A helpless lifeboat; the ictims of an attack by one of your ıirate friends aren't likely to at-ack us! And the pirate ship isn't ıround or it would show on the radar copes—"

"Very logical!" Kim snapped ack. "A lifeboat drifting 'helpless' n millions of cubic miles of space, ınd yet they don't radio a General Distress call until we 'just happen' o almost ram into them! Would ou like to bet these 'victims' aren't nterested in the location coordinates f that Venusian village, which are ucked in our chart locker?"

Dimitrios straightened up, haught-y. "Very well, Mr. Rogers. I oncede that there is a possibility f danger. Weapons shall be issued!"

"Thank you. Fran, stand by to heck coordination vector!" Kim urned to his computor panel, seeming to lose all awareness of anyone else on the bridge. Dimitrios led the others slowly back to the tube.

Minutes later, Kim passed them on the way down to the airlock room. Dimitrios was holding a Chavez rifle and instructing the others on its use. Kim snorted in disgust—in the whole expedition, only half the members had ever been in space; and then, few of them had been farther out than the Moon!—and continued on aft, pulled his spacesuit gear from its wall locker, and struggled into it.

Dimitrios came into the airlock room with his long, swinging stride just as Kim finished testing his suit's pressure and circulation system. "You're going out to the lifeboat?" the scientist asked.

"We can't allow them to board us without checking," Kim replied, fastening his guns back around his waist.

"I'll *go with you!*" Dimitrious stated decisively, opening the locker that held his own spacesuit.

"I'd better handle this, myself," Kim said. "If they get me, it'll be up to you to protect the ship."

Dimitrios stopped, then turned around and stuck out his hand. "I've been wrong about you, Kim. You're all right!" He was smiling quietly, a new respect in his eyes. He had no illusions about the dangers Kim might be going out to face—and, for the sake of the others, Kim was electing to go it alone—

Kim shook hands, firmly. "I'll

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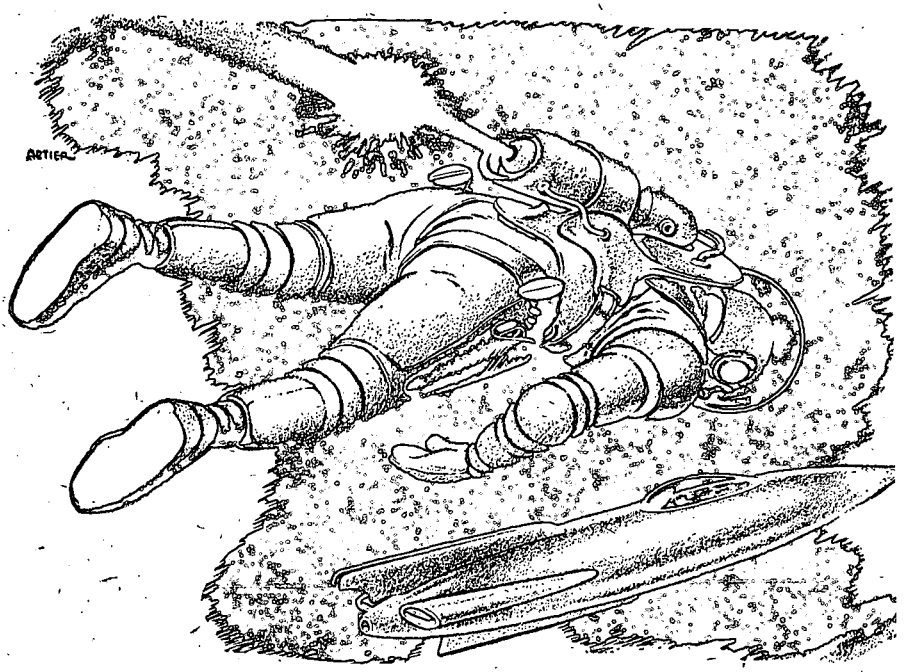

contact you by radio if everything's all right," he said. Then he clamped down his fishbowl helmet and turned to the airlock. Pirate or not, he knew he had won Dimitrios' undying admiration. He shut himself into the airlock and switched on the air-pumps, feeling pleased with himself, if a little impatient. The more civilized people were, it seemed, the longer it took them to learn . . . .

He adjusted the rocket V-frame on his back as the outer portal swung open, then crawled out into the star-sprinkled darkness. He hooked his magnetic boot-soles to the hull and stomped up over the back of the ship into the full, blazing glare o the Sun before he spotted the life boat, a silvery streak of metal severa thousand yards away. Abruptly he kicked himself away from the ship and glided out across the black emptiness, rockets flaming at the tips of his V-frame. It seemed so long ago since he had seen others do this—

HE crawled through the lifeboat's airlock and stepped down into the turbine room, gun ready. The ceiling lights glowed dimly on the dark, polished bulkheads and deck. Kim peered down at the deck, won-

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deringly. There were little brown spots of dried blood weaving along the deckplates to the airlock.

There was a tense, heavy silence within the little ship.

He moved forward, cautiously. Through the doorway into the shadowy bunkroom. His boots clicked loudly on the deckplates, following the trail of the little brown spots.

A faint whimpering sound came from the side of the room. Kim whirled, then strode deliberately around a row of tall double-bunks and halted, his gun hanging loosely from his fist.

The woman was strapped into one of the bunks, her long, brown hair falling straight and stringy to the deck. He stared at her pinched, hollow-cheeked face, the thin, knobby arms and legs, the skin stretched taut over the rib-cage of her starved body. Madness glowed in her sunken eyes. If Kim had ever seen her before, he couldn't recognize her now.

He turned and moved slowly, grimly, up toward the control room.

There was a brown pool of dried, peeling blood in the back of the control room, with two tiny burns of Maxim beams in the bulkhead above it. The Maxim pistol lay on the top of the grid-table, in the center of the room. And beyond the grid-table, sprawled in a seat at the side of the forward control bank, was the huge, muscular, fat-bellied figure of—

Captain Black Dog MacSneary!

dried blood, but it was not his own. He stared up at Kim with a bright, dawning recognition.

"Rothman!" he exclaimed. "Damme, I should've known! That message to 'Kim Rogers'—"

"Sit still!" Kim commanded harshly. He walked up to the grid-table, picked up the Maxim, and glanced at the gauge in its butt-plate. The charge was empty. He tossed it into the back of the room. Its sharp clatter against metal made an ear-piercing crash in his helmet phones. Wincing, he unsnapped the helmet and rocked it back on his airtanks.

MacSneary rubbed grimy hands over his naked belly and laughed softly. "With the little beard you've grown, I hardly recognized you! So Rothman, the space pirate, has gone on the side o' Earth—"

"Stop acting, Mac!" Kim snapped. "You laid to out here in this lifeboat after escaping the Space Fleet, didn't you? You planned to catch us on our Earth-Venus trajectory and have us pick you up on a General Distress call—"

"It was a bit of a gamble," the old pirate admitted, proudly. "We were a mite short o' rations, and it seemed for awhile you blasted fools never would show up—" He stared at the dried blood on the floor and chuckled softly.

Kim's eyes narrowed with growing horror. It was like a steel spring tightening up inside him. "The

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mured. "But the blonde and the redhead—you wouldn't have left *them* behind—"

His finger tightened on the trigger.

"Blonde?" MacSneary echoed in wide-eyed innocence. "Redhead? Delightful subjects, Mr. Rothman, but whatever *could* you be talking about?" Then he grinned and belched gently.

The complete, brazen frankness of the man left Kim sick with revulsion. He jammed his gun into his holster and swung away from the fat, grinning old pirate.

"Come on!" he ordered flatly. "Do every single thing I tell you to do, MacSneary, or I'll start by blowing your arms and legs off—and the rest of you, inch by inch—"

He strode back into the bunkroom, stopped, and turned to face the doorway. MacSneary followed him, obediently. Kim pointed toward the bunk at the side. "Unstrap her," he ordered. "Pick her up!"

Flashing his snaggle-toothed grin, MacSneary waddled over to the bunk. He leaned over the girl, began working at the straps, and giggled softly.

The girl stretched her mouth open and screamed. She screamed and screamed . . . .

THE lifeboat was left drifting in space as the *Eohippus* resumed its journey. Fran double-checked her instrument readings and nodded. "Course registers as computed!"

Kim slid the covering back over his grid-table and settled back in his chair. "That's that," he said drily.

Fran turned, looked at him, then got up out of her chair and walked over to him. She didn't say anything. She just climbed onto his lap, put her arms around him, and buried her face in the hollow of his chest.

Kim held her close and ran his fingers slowly through her long, silken hair. There didn't seem to be much he could say, either.

Footsteps sounded on the bridge behind them. Kim turned his head to look up into the pale, drawn features of Dr. Gregor Dimitrios. The woman's in sick bay," Dimitrios said huskily. "Starvation and shock, mostly—I think she'll pull through! The man—" He spoke the word with utter loathing. "We locked him in one of the staterooms."

"Thanks," Kim said.

Dimitrios wiped the sweat from his face with his palms, tried to wipe away the screaming and babbling of the woman as they had pulled the spacesuit off her . . . .

He would never forget that, Kim knew. None of them would. Kim only felt dull and lifeless inside. He had seen it before.

"Keep a guard posted outside the stateroom at all times," he said. "MacSneary will do anything he can to get at our chart locker and learn the location of those Venusians."

"We'll—we'll have to take him to Venus—" Dimitrios stammered.

"And turn him loose in Venusport," Kim affirmed. "But we'll pass

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he word around. I wouldn't want to ɔe in MacSneary's boots, then."

Dimitrios turned and stumbled ɔack to the tube.

They've learned, Kim thought grimly; *they know what it can be like, now!*

Fran reached up and touched his smooth cheek. "You've shaved," she murmured. "Your beard's gone.)

They were alone, in the faint starlight of the bridge. Kim made love to her, caressed her soft body, wanting her. But he suddenly realized that he wanted even more to make her happy; he thought of the peaceful, quiet little country homes on Earth—the Earth where he could never live—

He could never give her that! The disappointment was like a sharp knife twisting in his chest.

"Fran," he whispered. "I want to give you a home—"

She grew still in his arms, listening to his thoughts, almost. Understanding him—fully and completely, for the first time—

And wanting him to speak, to tell her all the little things, the fine things, the big, grand things that went through his mind. But Kim couldn't speak. And, calmly, she understood that, too.

"We'll make a home, Kim," she whispered. "Wherever we are—"

THE *Eohippus* was three days out from Venusport when Kim called a conference in his stateroom. It was a private conference with Dimitrios, alone. They mixed drinks and lighted cigarettes, sitting across from each other at the small reading table, and Kim opened the discussion with a statement that brought the scientist bolt upright.

"I've just been in radio contact with Venusport," he said. "The free settlers are in revolt!"

"Great Scott!" Dimitrios gasped. "They're fighting?"

"The Venusport operator said it was small-arms," Kim replied. "The colonial government has barricaded the domed city under multiple force-screens. The revolutionists haven't any gun-batteries, and Space Fleet troopers have kept them away from the ships at the spaceport field, so far."

"How—how did it start?" Dimitrios stammered, aghast.

Kim shrugged. "Some fool on Earth sent several shipments of machinery and supplies to Venusport at prices the settlers couldn't pay. The stuff was sitting out on the spaceport field, rusting. Government property, you see—the officials at Venusport couldn't do anything with it without Earth's authorization, the Space Fleet has to protect it, and now there's hell to pay!"

"Can we get in at the spaceport field?"

"Probably. If the revolutionists have captured it by the time we get there, we can hold them off with our force-screen. They probably won't molest us after they've learned who we are."

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Dimitrios gulped his drink down, turned to the liquor dispenser, and refilled his glass. "Man!" he exclaimed. "And I thought I had something to tell *you!*"

Kim glanced up, sharply. "What?"

"The pirate girl," Dimitrios explained, turning back to the table. "She's been up and around the past several days. Just a few hours ago, she slipped past our guard and went into that stateroom where we have MacSneary!"

Kim arched an eyebrow. "Is he dead?" he asked casually.

The scientist gave him an incredulous glance, then took another fierce swallow of liquor. "Dead? No!" he exclaimed harshly. "You—you can hear them laughing, playing in there—"

They stared at each other, silently. Then Kim gave a slow shake of his head. "Sometimes," he muttered, "a woman can be more ruthless than a man!"

"We called her to come out!" Dimitrios blurted thickly. "She told us—"

"Leave her in there!" Kim said. "It'll keep them out of our hair. If MacSneary was planning to do anything before we reached Venus, I think he'd have acted by now." He smiled grimly, adding, "Just see that they get their meals!"

He sipped his drink, thoughtfully. Dimitrios was silent, brooding. Kim straightened, yawned, and dismissed his morbid thoughts with a dry chuckle. "You've got the expedition all planned out, I hope?"

Dimitrios nodded. "We'll pick up guides and mud-cats in Venusport—I hope! If this revolutionary uprising doesn't hinder us too much—"

"Best to get that done as quickly as possible," Kim advised curtly. "The sooner we get away from the zone of trouble, the less chance we'll have of getting mixed up in it." He paused, scowling. "There's a little business I want to look into, myself," he announced tersely. "I want to see if the *Voodoo* has arrived there, yet—"

"You expect trouble from Yin Chao-Tang?"

"I expect to find something!" Kim admitted vaguely. "I'll tell you more about it when I've found it!"

The Venusian Revolt

IT was an acknowledged fact among all spacemen that Venus was the hardest planet in the System on which to make a landing. First, like all planets, Venus wobbled so that no blind instrument landing could be computed. Second, Venus was hidden beneath her dense cloud-blanket, so that no direct observations could be made of her surface. Third, her surface was a nightmare of low swamplands and tremendous mountain ranges that towered hundreds of miles into the clouds. Fourth, radar patterns were too vague at over ten thousand miles, so that no radar observations could be made until a ship was actually making its

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approach.

Every ship that approached Venus had to hover above the clouds, make radar observations, check their maps, and travel around the planet to the Keyhole Gap in the Misty Mountains, a deep cut in the giant peaks that gave them room enough to maneuver down to a landing on the spongey field at Venusport. As yet, Venusport was the only known landing site on the planet.

Such maneuvering demanded close team-work. Kim watched the radar scopes, plotted their course down from second to second, making split-second changes when necessary. Fran controlled the massive spacecraft, keeping it poised delicately on its grav-plates in the merciless gravity-pull of Venus, guiding it with deft touches on the firing-keys.

The *Eohippus* came floating down out of the swirling mists, a black, six-hundred-foot blob of fat hull blurring out of rolling clouds burned orange-red and shot with gold from the penetrating infra-red rays of the hidden Sun. Port and starboard rockets whispered their throaty murmurs as the huge ship bellied down to the soft mud of the immense spaceport field. Her hull squished ponderously into the mud as the grav-plates faded off.

And Kim collapsed back into his chair with an explosive sigh of relief. He just barely saw, through his fatigue-dimmed eyes, Fran's pale, tense features as she turned to smile back at him. Her cheeks glistened with sweat.

Kim took out his cigarettes, ejected one for himself, and tossed the pack to her. They both needed a smoke.

Feet banged up the ladder-rungs and Dimitrios heaved himself up out of the tube. "Well done!" he exclaimed jovially. "The neatest Venus landing I've ever seen—congratulations!"

"Nothing to it," Fran muttered sourly, pushing a damp strand of hair back from her forehead.

"Stop jumping around!" Kim reprimanded him, gruffly. "We've settled down far enough in this muddy goo, already!"

Dimitrios chuckled, perching himself on the edge of the grid-table before Kim. "You've called Venusport Medical to come out?" he asked affably.

"I have not!" Kim retorted. "I'm not going to lift my little finger for a single, blasted thing until the goose-bumps fade off of my goose-bumps! We gently grazed a twenty-mile-high cliff back there, and the whole shebang came down in an avalanche!"

"Better get Spaceport Repair out here, too, when we call in!" Fran commented with the practical mysticism of a woman.

Dimitrios jerked around, stared at her in open-mouthed shock. "I didn't feel—I didn't hear anything!" he stammered. "Were we struck by something? What's the damage? Why didn't our screen—"

Kim, whose mind had grown some-

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what accustomed to Fran's feminine thought-patterns, interpreted: "We need Spaceport Repair to take a look at our air-purification unit."

"Oh!" Dimitrios seemed somewhat flustered. "Isn't it working?"

"Been kicking up a fuss ever since we left Earth!" Fran spoke glumly around her cigarette. "You can't expect top efficiency when you buy a used ship, though," she added, stretching luxuriously. "This old crate has seen better days!"

"I suppose so," Dr. Gregor Dimitrios muttered. Then, he seemed to regain his composure. "Look here!" he said. "I want to get Medical out here and get past Quarantine as quickly as possible! I've got to get into the Governor's Tower in Venusport and file authorization for our expedition and line up mud-cats and cat-drivers."

"Keep your shorts on!" Kim snapped. "First, take a good look out there at the field!"

Dimitrios and Fran both peered out through the bridge's transparent blister. They saw a vast, sprawling, muddy field littered with the blackened hulks of spacecraft; while off in the distance, the dim blur of the giant dome of Venusport rose vaguely into the sifting orange-red mists.

Then they both realized what he meant. At either end of the field were huge torpedo-shaped hulls bristling with gun turrets: Space Fleet dreadnaughts. And at the far end of the field, opposite the dim Venusport dome, there were brilliant little flashes of light. Wicked sputtering little flashes. The kind made by Maxim pistols and Chavez rifles. The spaceport field was under small-arms siege.

"We can probably get into Venusport through the underground cargo tunnels," Kim mused thoughtfully. "But it looks like you may have to get more than *official* authorization, Dimitrios, if we're to drive an expeditionary convoy of mud-cats out through the ranks of those rebel forces!"

"Ummm! 'Fraid you're right!" Dimitrios admitted. "This blasted revolt may hold us up!"

"Maybe it won't," Kim refuted mildly. "I want you to go into Venusport alone, Dimitrios. Have a chat with the officials about this revolt and about our expedition. And find out whether they know I'm Kim Rothman, space pirate—if Yin Chao-Tang has arrived safely, they probably do!"

Dimitrios frowned his disapproval. "Well—if it worries you—"

Kim gave a snort of disdain. "All the free-booters and outlaws of Venusport are probably out there helping those rebels fight!" he pointed out, impatiently. "If Yin Chao-Tang's been spreading word around Venusport that I'm a pirate after the Venusian treasure, those rebels are going to know about me and like me. Maybe I could make a deal with them to get our mud-cat convoy through!"

"Oh!" Again, Dimitrios was flust-

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ered. "I—ah—I see," he said. "Then you and Miss Freemont will remain aboard ship until—"

"Fran will remain aboard ship," Kim corrected, "ready to clamp down our force-screen in case those rebels break through the Space Fleet lines. You will go in to pow-wow with the chiefs. I've got some personal business to attend to." He blew smoke through his nostrils, grinning devilishly, then leaned forward and flipped on the ship's radio. "Now, I'll call Venusport Medical," he said . . .

AS soon as the rubber-clad Medical examiners had finished prodding him, asking questions, and poking needles into him, Kim pulled on his lucite helmet, opened the filter-valve, and let himself into the ship's airlock. As the outer portal swung open, he dived head-first out the opening and splashed into the soft, clinging mud.

He rolled onto his back and wiped the mud off his helmet.

He could hear the faint, shuddering blasts of gunfire down at the far end of the field, now. None of it sounded near him. No sparkling beams hissed over his head. Satisfied, he scrambled up on his hands and knees and went clawing through the deep mud toward the looming bulk of a nearby space freighter. Once there, he climbed to his feet. His body, clad only in brief shorts and gun-belt, was plastered with stinking mud. His helmet filter cut out the stink.

He went trudging off in the ankle-deep slime, sometimes sinking to his hips, his eyes searching warily among the dense cluster of big space-craft hulls.

It began to rain. This was winter at Venusport; the rainy season. The rain came down in shimmering, blue-green curtains from the darkening mists above. Water swirled over the top of the mud and wispy clouds of white steam arose. The dense deluge washed his helmet sparkling clean in seconds, sluiced the layer of mud from his body. His skin smarted and stung from the impact of the raindrops. But he was thankful for the cover the rain afforded him.

It took him an hour of searching to find the *Voodoo*. There was no mistaking her when he did find her—he knew every bulge, scratch, and tarnish of her worn hull-plates. She stood alone, untended among the big, crowding ships.

He entered the airlock, warily, and stalked through her cool interior, his gun drawn and ready. She was empty, but the fuel-tanks were full and her provision-stores were well-stocked. He pulled out her log book and studied it with interest.

Then he left her and moved stealthily through the pouring, murmuring rain in the direction of the Venusport dome. The muttering boom of beams striking and disintegrating their targets sounded far-off, muffled and unreal. He wondered if the rebels would succeed in infiltrating the Space Fleet lines under

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cover of the rain—but they'd probably had the chance, before now, and failed.

The flickering of the force-screen protecting the Venusport dome stopped him short of the field's edge. Several ships lay within the screen's protection—most of them, he noted with disgust, were official craft. He turned aside to the concrete pill-box entrance to one of the underground cargo tunnels that ran beneath the field.

Passing through the airlock, he removed his helmet and descended the long stairway to the broad, rock-walled corridor with its swiftly moving cargo ramp. He jumped onto the ramp and was borne rapidly toward the domed city. The ramp slowed and curved into a huge, vaultlike warehouse chamber stacked high with giant crates. He stepped off the ramp, passed unconcerned through throngs of muscular stevedores, and took an automatic lift to the upper levels.

The white-haired old man in the office behind the transparent wall labeled *Venusport Communications* was at least a hundred and twenty years old. He was dressed simply in a scant loinstring supported by a gun-belt, and his lean, milk-white body was supple and muscular. The plate on his curving desk bore the name: Rene Moskowitz. He shook hands cordially and waved Kim to a chair.

"That was a neat bit of juggling you did, bringing the *Eohippus* in!" he praised in a quiet, gentle voice. "Few teams ever wiggle past old Shadow Peak without knocking a chunk off her! Now, what can we do for you, Mr. Rothman?"

Kim grinned good-naturedly. "So you know I'm a pirate, eh?"

"There's been some talk," Moskowitz conceded. "Understand you're after the sacred metal of the Gep Tzong!"

"The—Gep Tzong?" Kim echoed questioningly.

"Name of those Toad Men up in the Misty Mountains," Moskowitz explained. "They've been making raids on the outlying plantations, carrying off equipment. Which is why the free settlers were so anxious to get the new equipment we were holding here. Earth wouldn't authorize us to release it, though—so the free settlers are trying to take it!"

"You sound like you don't blame them, much!" Kim remarked critically.

"I'm not sayin'." Moskowitz grinned with calm wisdom.

Kim nodded approvingly. "What I want," he said, "is this: you keep a file on the routine radio checks made by ships enroute to or from Venus. I want to know about the voyage of one Ying Chao-Tang, aboard the scout cruiser *Voodoo*—"

"I don't need to search any file for that one!" Moskowitz replied, grinning. "This Chao-Tang made radio contact with us on routine check until he was about ten days' out from Earth — then he quit! The [illegible] here about two

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weeks ago with a three-man crew: a man and two women—"

"Oriental?" Kim asked sharply.

Moskowitz shook his head, chuckling. "There's a large Oriental faction here, though. You might check their religious leaders—"

Kim rose abruptly. "Thanks."

"Not at all, son."

THERE were four small amphitheaters on Level Two. On the glassite front walls were the symbols of each: the Cross of Jesus, the Star of David, the Star of Mohammed, and the Statue of Buddha. There were other temples elsewhere in the city, but Kim found these four together.

In the small office behind the transparent wall bearing the Star of David sat a tall, gray-haired man. On the curving desk before him was a name-plate: Rabbi Jacobi Rosenblum. He rose, rustling his simple, gray robe, and extended his hand as Kim entered. "Good afternoon, Mr. Rothman. Sit down."

Kim shook hands and sat down. "I need help," he said, "and I think you will help me."

"If I can," Rosenblum replied, sinking back behind his desk. He leaned forward, intently. "Kim Rothman, a space pirate, has arrived in Venusport with a scientific expedition. He has agreed to guard the expedition with his guns in return for the sacred radioactive metal of the Gep Tzong—is that true?"

"There is scientific basis for doubt that any such metal exists," Kim replied guardedly. "It's like the Amerindian legends of the golden cities that sent Spanish conquistadores to their death in the deserts. The purpose of the expedition is to prove whether there are Toad Men or Gep Tzong as you call them—if there are, who they are, and what they are!"

Rosenblum frowned dubiously. "Several thousand Gep Tzong have raided the outlying plantations, Mr. Rothman! They exist, well enough —"

"Who said so?"

Rosenblum practically bit his tongue with surprise. "Ah! There you have a point. The plantation-owners claimed they were raided, and the delicate situation here at Venusport turned into an armed revolt. But there is no one to profit by the revolt—it has halted our exports to Earth! Even if the rebels win, it will stop further supplies coming from Earth! And the Earth corporations have no interest here—it is forbidden by law!"

Kim waved his hand in an airy gesture. "All right, that's your problem. My concern is the expedition for the Biochemical Research Department. Do you realize that if there *are* native Venusians, we're actually invaders of this planet?"

"Eh? But—but that's absurd! Many of us were born here—" The tall Rabbi was profoundly shocked. "But of course, of course—it is still *their* planet! Still, there do not seem to be many of them—savages, too—

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perhaps, then, an agreement—"

"That," Kim pointed out, flatly, "is the purpose of the expedition I'm serving. Now, do we understand each other?"

Rosenblum took a deep breath and let it out, slowly. "I believe we do, Mr. Rothman," he affirmed. "So what is it that I can do for you?"

"Take me to the priesthood of the Oriental faction, here," Kim replied. "I am representing the family of Chao-Tang, of Earth!"

Rosenblum pursed his lips. "I see," he said, then rose briskly. "Come along!"

They went out into the broad corridors. Venusport was a busy, thriving metropolis, abounding with merchants and shop-keepers and technical plant workers. Mingled with them were sturdy plantation owners and reptile hunters, garbed in suits of the sleek, blue-gray hide of the *ghirakko* dog. All of them, men and women, wore guns. The hunters carried their Chavez rifles easily in the crook of their arm.

Rosenblum led the way with a long, robe-flapping stride. "Business as usual," he explained of the crowds in the corridors. "You'd never know there were hostilities all around us, except that a few of the taverns have closed and you don't see many nondescript characters about. We had an influx of them before the revolt!"

"Pirates?" Kim asked casually.

"A few," the Rabbi asserted. "Cutthroats and blackguards, mostly. All talking of the treasure of the Gep Tzong!" He cast a speculative sideglance at Kim. "Someone with money could give your Department expedition some stiff competition!"

Kim nodded. "I'm aware of that."

Rosenblum was silent as they rode an escalator downward. Then, as they reached the First Level, he turned quizzically. "Mind telling me why you came to me?"

Kim grinned sheepishly. "My parents were Jewish."

The Rabbi nodded. "I understand." He strode onward, briskly.

Kim followed him with a thoughtful scowl. There was something else, Kim realized suddenly, that Rosenblum might help him with—it wasn't easy for him to find words for it—

He stopped with grim decision and caught the Rabbi's arm. "I've got to ask you something!" he said stiffly. "Something else—"

Rosenblum turned, smiling faintly. "Anything, Mr. Rothman!"

"There's a girl—" Kim instantly felt like a fool, but he couldn't stop. "My team-mate," he explained. "She was born on Venus, but raised on Earth. She's—civilized—"

"Of course!" Rosenblum nodded understandingly. "Her name?"

"Frances Freemont."

"She is Jewish?"

Kim shook his head. "No. Protestant, I think—I don't know—"

Rosenblum's smile broadened. "And you wish to marry her, of course. What is your religion, Kim Rothman?"

Kim shrugged. "What *is* religion?

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There are the planets, the Sun, the stars—the Universe—and us. How? Finding out how is science. But why? Wondering why, seeking answers in the laws of the Universe, seeing purpose and design—that's religion, isn't it?"

"The religion of the stars!" Rosenblum nodded quietly. "There is its counterpart here on Venus. The swamp-jungle, the teeming life—wild, ferocious, but with purpose and design. And meaning. The religion of nature. And who is to deny that God's wisdom is revealed in His works?" He strolled on, hands clasped behind his back. "Some can find His wisdom in nature and the Universe; some can't. Those who can't come to us for spiritual guidance."

He lapsed into pensive silence for a moment, then turned and gazed at Kim, searchingly. "There is a recognized custom, here on Venus. When a man and woman come out of the wilderness wearing clothes from the same *ghrákko* skin, they are officially married. But Miss Freemont wouldn't know that, I suppose—"

Kim shook his head, miserably.

Rosenblum patted his shoulder. "Before your expedition leaves, I shall speak to her," he promised softly. "I'm—I'm glad you asked me, Kim Rothman."

THE apartment they entered had no identifying mark or symbol on the outside. Within, in the silent gloom tainted with sweet incense, was a small, fat Oriental in a golden robe. He bowed low.

Rosenblum returned the bow. "Rabbi Jacobi Rosenblum," he introduced himself, then gestured to Kim. "Kim Rothman. He represents the family of Chao-Tang, of Earth."

The Oriental bowed again. Rosenblum slapped Kim's shoulder affectionately and took his leave.

The Oriental priest faced Kim and spoke in a soft, reedy voice. "What is your wish?"

"The brother of Yin Chao-Tang would wish to reclaim the body," Kim answered. "I can identify him."

"Come." The priest pushed aside a curtain and led Kim through a small doorway. They passed down a long, narrow corridor to its end, where the priest touched a stud that slid a panel aside. They entered a low, vaultlike room.

The body was stretched on a stone table. Most of the chest was blown away, but there was no mistaking the bald dome of the head, the thin features, and the white goatee.

"It is Yin Chao-Tang," Kim said.

The priest sucked his breath in, sharply. "Then the space pirates have not cheated us! It is well."

Kim knew what he meant. If an Oriental is killed in space, the body must be brought to its "cousins" on some planet for shipment home. If it isn't, the Oriental "cousins" demand satisfaction—which in the

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case of murder, meant slow death for the murderer.

And this was a case of murder.

"It is well," Kim agreed grimly.

Departure From Venusport

THE mud-cat threw mud and water fifty feet high from its broad, steel-flanged caterpillar treads as it came mushing and wallowing out across the spaceport field. The rain was coming down in a fine, blue-green haze and soaked the thick mud on the cat's armored sides so it dropped off in sticky blobs, revealing the rusted plates beneath with their red letters: Spaceport Repair.

Off in the distance somewhere, hidden by the rain, there were still the muffled, drumming explosions of gunfire.

But there was activity around the squat, ugly hull of the *Eohippus*. A huge tarpaulin had been stretched from her back out to supporting poles and guy-wires, forming a shelter alongside the ship that reached out to the metal hatchway of a big freight elevator. Gangs of helmeted stevedores were unloading crates and boxes from the ship's cargo locks, dragging them over to the freight elevator, and lowering them into the tunnels below the field.

The mud-cat splattered to a halt with a shrill whine of its turbines and Kim swung down from its tiny airlock. He waved the cat-driver off and went slogging through the mud toward the ship, noting several members of the expedition standing around watching the unloading. Kim waved to them and clambered up the short metal ladder to the ship's airlock.

Fran came running through the steel corridor within to meet him, just as he was tugging his helmet loose.

"Kim!" She leaped at him, hugged him, laughed and hugged him again. "I was so worried! Where've you been?"

"—Uh—out reclaiming my ship, the *Voodoo*," he said, somewhat out of breath. Then he held her close, chuckling. "Blast it, Fran—I wasn't gone *that* long!"

She struggled, pushed free, and held him back at arm's length, looking up at him, gravely. "What's this about the *Voodoo?*" she asked.

Kim's features sobered. "Yin Chao-Tang never reached Venus alive," he explained. "I've taken over the *Voodoo* and had Spaceport Repair weld a steel beam across her airlock. She'll be here when we want her again, or I'll know the reason why. Where's our prisoners?"

"MacSneary and that—that girl? Locked in their stateroom, I suppose."

Kim nodded, satisfied. "Any word from Dimitrios?"

"Not yet." She moved close to him, again.

"Better get back on the bridge, then." He kissed her quickly, swung her around and snapped her

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bottom. She leaped back into the corridor with a pleased howl.

Kim turned aft, shaking his head and grinning. He'd really lose something if he ever lost Fran!

A studious-looking young man with a Chavez rifle across his arm stood before the locked stateroom door. He grinned as Kim approached. "How's it going, Mr. Rogers?" he asked pleasantly.

"It's Rothman, again," Kim told him. "I'm going in and speak to that space pirate in there as a space pirate. I'd rather not have you around!"

The young man's features tightened and he stared hard at Kim for a moment. Then he shrugged indifferently. "I suppose it's all right." He hitched up his shorts and walked on down the corridor.

Kim pressed the auto-lock and slid back the door. His hand dropped to the butt of his right gun as he stepped into the stateroom.

Then he saw it wasn't necessary. Black Dog MacSneary was sprawled on the floor, his back against the far wall, and the girl was sitting on his lap, clutched in the embrace of his thick, hairy arms. She turned her head and glared up at Kim.

"Get outta here!" she snarled.

"Sorry," he said softly. "No more free meals and bunk for you two. On your feet, now, or I'll scorch your bottoms!"

The girl muttered a curse and turned back to MacSneary. The old grin and laughed harshly. "'Smatter, sonny-boy? Want us to go runnin' free and eatin' people?" Then he threw back his head and filled the chamber with thunderous laughter.

Kim smiled mirthlessly. "You almost fooled me with that, Mac—but not quite!" he said. "Sweetie-pie, here, was a little too anxious to get back in your lap for me to believe you'd chewed up her girl-friends!"

"Oh, go blow!" the girl sneered into MacSneary's beard.

"I've seen cannibal madness in people before," Kim went on, gazing down at MacSneary and ignoring the girl. "I got curious about this. I found out a lot!"

MacSneary was listening, now. His cold, hard eyes were squinting narrowly. "You found out *what?*" he asked scornfully.

"After you escaped the Space Fleet in that lifeboat," Kim told him, gently, "you heaved to on the Earth-Venus lane and waited for us. But then you picked up the routine radio-check of Yin Chao-Tang, in the *Voodoo*. You knew the Chao-Tang family was in on the expedition; you thought Yin was a part of it. You hailed him, same as you did us—"

The girl had been staring up, her mouth widening. "He knows!" she gasped.

"But Yin tried to make a crooked deal," Kim continued. "You didn't

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he had the *Voodoo*. So you shot him, loaded his body back aboard the *Voodoo*, and sent three of your crew on ahead to Venus. You and Sweetie-pie, here, remained to bait us with that cannibalism deal—"

"You dirty scum!" the girl suddenly shouted at MacSneary. "And you *starved* me - - "

The pirate's big paw struck her on the temple, knocking her completely out of his lap onto the deck. "Shut up!" he snapped gutterally.

"It was a neat scheme!" Kim said, grinning. "A nice, big practical joke. We arrive in Venusport and start spreading the word about you stuffing yourself on your women, and then your women step out and make us the laughing-stock of Venus. Meanwhile, you've lined up as many henchmen here as you can buy—and the rest would only laugh at me if I tried to hire 'em—"

MacSneary rolled his eyes and shrugged comically. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained! And now, I presume you want us to take our leave of this little — ahem — love nest?" His rough tones mocked Kim. The girl stirred and moaned on the deck, then sat up. Both men ignored her.

"Clear out!" Kim ordered distinctly.

MacSneary heaved a regretful sigh. "Ah, well—come along, Poodles!" He put a thick arm around the girl, climbed to his feet, and lifted her bodily off the deck. He half-carried, half-dragged her through the door and down the corridor. Kim followed them, grimly.

MacSneary turned around when they reached the airlock chamber. "You're really making a mistake, you know!"

"Am I?" Kim asked lightly.

The girl pulled herself erect beside MacSneary, a dark red bruise on the side of her face. MacSneary shook loose from her irritably. "Of course!" he spoke to Kim. "You're going to have plenty of competition getting that Venusian treasure. You will need all the help you can get! We ought to be friends, Mr. Rothman—not enemies!"

Kim pointed to the stack of boxed helmets in the corner of the room. "Get your helmets on!" He fastened his own helmet, deftly.

The girl moved quickly, snatching a helmet and plunking it down over her head. Kim noticed that her body was dirt-smeared, unwashed, and clad only in a ragged strip of cloth. MacSneary merely shrugged and moved leisurely, taking his own good time about putting on a helmet.

"Snap it up!" Kim told him, opening the airlock portal for the girl.

"Of course, of course!" MacSneary followed them into the airlock, waited patiently until the inner door was sealed and the outer door opened, then turned to Kim. The girl jumped immediately to the slimy mud.

"You realize, of course, this means war between us!" the old pirate said softly.

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Kim took a step backward, then planted a hard kick squarely in the middle of the pirate's dirty red trunks. MacSneary went hurtling out of the airlock, head-first, and smacked into the mud.

The girl stood over him, staring down at him, blankly.

McSneary climbed slowly, laboriously to his feet. "Come, Poodles," he said, taking the girl's arm. "We aren't appreciated here."

They went stumbling and lurching off across the field. The girl looked back, once, and stuck her tongue out at Kim.

DIMITRIOS had radioed Fran by the time Kim returned to the bridge. The scientist wanted them both to meet him in the Governor's office.

Fran belted a gun onto her thigh, donned a helmet, and they rode a tunnel ramp into the city. The Governor's office was on Level Fifteen, a sumptuous, vaultlike suite of rooms. Dimitrios came hurrying to meet them in the glittering anteroom.

"Trouble!" the scientist muttered cryptically. "Follow me—the Governor's waiting to receive us!"

As they followed him across the room to a tall pair of ivory portals, Kim noted with a faint smile the blue-uniformed Space Fleet guards standing stiffly at attention around the room. The Governor of Venusport certainly wasn't taking any chances, what with armed rebels using the hue and cry about his very doors!

A set of almost perfect twins in snappy blue uniforms knocked their heels together. The two tall, ivory portals swung sedately open. A soft chime rang from somewhere within. Then Dimitrios, Kim, and Fran walked in. They strode across the deep, ebony pile carpet toward a monstrosity of a desk in bright ivory.

Behind the desk sat a hard-faced man in a brilliantly beribboned uniform. Beside the desk sat another man also in uniform but less colorfully berbboned. The man beside the desk rose, clicked his heels, and bowed. "Gentlemen!" he said. "His Excellency, Vallisanovitch Serkov, Governor of Venus!"

Serkov gave them a thin-lipped smile. "My Aide-de-Camp, Commander Hans Kruger of the Space Fleet. Sit down, Gentlemen." His eyes flicked over Fran's slender figure. "And ladies," he added softly.

They sat down. Commander Kruger of the Space Fleet sat down. Governor Serkov leaned his elbows on his desk. "I will address my remarks to all three of you," he said bluntly. "You have placed me in a rather ticklish position with your proposed expedition. However, you have authorization from Earth, so I can't stop you—"

"*Stop* us?" Fran exclaimed.

Serkov silenced her with a curt wave of his hand. "Kindly let me finish!" he snapped. He leaned back in his chair and stared at them,

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angrily. "I have already given authorization to a group of free settlers to go out in an expedition to attack these Gep Tzong animals! I have allowed twenty mud-cats and drivers to leave Venusport and join this expedition. Its purpose is to drive those toadlike ape beasts back into the mountains.

"You people from the Biochemical Research Department are under the assumption that these Gep Tzong are intelligent creatures! Nothing could be farther from the truth. Our settlers have reported seeing the beasts and killing them on sight. They are beasts, similar to Earth's apes, nothing else!

"There has been considerable rabble-rousing around here with a fantastic tale of a sacred treasure and villages and temples in the mountains—utter rot! The rebel group has claimed that the Gep Tzong beasts have been raiding to get machinery, which is nothing more than a bald lie concocted to cover up their own shiftlessness. If they'd taken proper care of their machinery, they'd still have it. No Gep Tzong beasts stole it, I assure you!"

"I was afraid of this," Dimitrios said coldly. "Your Excellency, the Department does not concede that the Gep Tzong are beasts—but neither do we claim they are intelligent! It is the purpose of our expedition to *find out* if they're intelligent—"

"Nevertheless," Serkov retorted, "the rebel group has used that lie as a propaganda basis for their armed rebellion against the government of Venusport. As I said, I cannot stop your expedition. But neither can I spare any troops to protect your expedition if you're foolish enough to go out in the Gep Tzong country!"

The scientist's face twitched into a pained smile. "I'm surprised that I should have to say this, but you aren't going to find out anything about the Gep Tzong by sending armed expeditions out to kill them!"

Serkov snorted. "You *are* fools, aren't you! Very well — that's your affair. But I must also add that any action on the part of your pirate cohort, here—" He flicked a finger in Kim's direction. "—Any action by him against the other expedition, which I have duly authorized, and I will see to it that he is arrested, tried, and executed within a week!"

Kim grinned mirthfully. "Sure you can spare the men for it?"

Serkov's face assumed the gray color of a chunk of granite. "That is the reason— the only reason— you were invited to this discussion, Mr. Rothman! I warn you that I am a man of my word!"

Kim nodded in mocking agreement. "And this other expedition —it's being formed by the —uh— 'free settlers' outside the attacking rebels' lines?"

"Yes," Commander Kruger spoke up, nodding. "The rebels allowed

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our mud-cats through to join that expedition."

Kim's eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "When was this?"

"Why—two weeks ago!" Kruger's brows went up. "Why do you ask?"

"Any reason they haven't left, already?"

"Takes time to organize an expedition, I suppose." Kruger shrugged perplexedly.

"It doesn't take two weeks!" Dimitrios exclaimed shrewdly.

"Uh huh!" Kim grunted. "And I'll bet they're waiting for us to start out, first."

"Eh?" Governor Serkov looked vaguely uneasy. "Why would they do that?"

Kim chuckled. "So we can show them the way to the Gep Tzong village, of course! And—to the sacred treasure!"

Serkov snorted. "Hogwash! There is no—"

"Let *me* finish!" Kim interjected harshly. "Do you know anything at all about who financed that armed expedition of so-called 'free settlers'? Do you know who's *leading* it?"

Serkov smiled thinly. "Do you?"

Kim nodded. "Black Dog MacSneary! Get your Fleet Intelligence agents out to check on the corpse of Yin Chao-Tang being held by the [illegible] Orientals, and who delivered [illegible] under what circumstances! [illegible]ing to find, Your Excel[illegible] you've already been [illegible]pirate!"

They waited while Serkov checked. It took most of an hour, but when the reports came trickling in, Serkov wasn't pleased. He got up and began pacing the deep pile carpet.

It became readily apparent, from the reports, that MacSneary's henchmen had succeeded in organizing an armed expedition of Venusport's toughest killers, roustabouts, and thieves with the Governor's complete, ignorant permission. Furthermore, that expedition was now encamped outside the lines of the attacking rebels, out of reach of the Governor and his Space Fleet troops.

Serkov shook his head, stubbornly. "There's nothing to be done about it now!" he said. "Perhaps they will still drive those Gep Tzong beasts back into the mountains. Dr. Dimitrios—" He swung to the scientist. "I do not think it advisable for your expedition to leave Venusport at this time!"

"Sorry!" Dimitrios smiled faintly. "You can't stop us—remember?"

Serkov stalked over and stood looking down at Dimitrios. "Please understand my position, sir!" the Governor said gruffly. "If you found out that those Gep Tzong were intelligent, why—why I'd lose the moral support of everyone inside the dome of this city!"

"You'd lose more than that!" Dimitrios exclaimed musingly. "You would lose Venus!"

"Eh?" Serkov started. "How's

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that?"

The scientist smiled up at him. "If the Gep Tzong are intelligent Venusian natives, Your Excellency—why, Venus belongs to them!"

"*What*?" Serkov gaped foolishly. "Why—why, that's preposterous!"

Dimitrios shook his head. "I'm afraid the Department—and the Earth government—would have a slightly different view! They would probably be very anxious for you to put down this rebel uprising as soon as possible. Poor example to the natives, you know!"

Serkov's eyes widened as the implication became clear. "Then—in *that* case—I'll win, either way! Huh? Yes, by George! Sir, how soon can your expedition be ready to leave?"

Dimitrios struggled to keep from laughing. "As soon as we can line up our mud-cats and get loaded!" he answered crisply.

"Then get at it!" Serkov ordered. "I'll send a parleying group out to talk the rebels into letting your group through their lines—about time I started parleying with 'em, anyhow! This fighting's doing neither side any good!" He stalked back behind his desk and slumped down. "Gentlemen, the planet Venus has been nothing but trouble to mankind ever since the first expedition tried to reach here!"

Dimitrios, rising, missed part of the Governor's last statement. The scientist turned, frowning. "Expedition? Another one?"

"The—uh—first one!" Serkov explained hastily. "The *S. S. Starling III*, I think it was, tried to reach Venus a hundred and seventy years ago! And it was another hundred years before they finally succeeded in reaching this hell-hole and planting a colony on it!"

"Ummm," Dimitrios ummed. "Well, we'd best get to work, Your Excellency—"

"Eh? Oh! Naturally!"

"Good day!" The scientist turned and stalked disdainfully out, Kim and Fran following in his footsteps. "'Excellency,' is he?" Dimitrios snorted, as they passed through the outer anteroom. "A diplomat the Earth government was probably glad to get rid of, that's what he is! So they sent him out here."

"That's usually the way it is," Kim remarked bitterly.

THERE was, in Venusport, a society known as the Dark Watch. They were called dark because, originally, most of them had been dark a few generations earlier. They were descendants of early Negro settlers from Earth. The peculiar radiology of Venus had gone to work on them through three or four rapid generations—as children were born in rapid succession on a frontier—and had changed their normally dark complexion to a color resembling the golden smoothness of rich butter-cream. It was about as near as they had come to the near-whiteness that had affe

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settlers' children.

And they were called the Watch because the demands of the frontier had considerably altered their status. The early Negro settlers had shipped out as unskilled workers. Their descendants were the best technicians in Venusport, noted for their mechanical wizardry; they were the maintenance squads who kept watch over the domed city's mechanisms, and were famed as mechanics and cat-drivers. The latter were well-acquainted, through extensive travelling, with most of the known region of the planet.

Their rise in status, of course, had nothing to do with the radiological affects of the planet on skin pigmentation. Their skill was due solely to the extensive training school they had organized.

Indeed, with one of their members, color had been no drawback whatsoever. This was Mr. Throwback Samson.

"I was nicknamed Throwback," Mr. Samson explained, introducing himself, "because that's just what I am—a throwback to my great-granddaddy!" And he flashed white, even teeth in a broad grin.

Kim gaped up at him, speechlessly.

They were standing on a tunnel floor. The moving cargo ramp had been stopped and big, powerful mud-cats were rumbling up on it from Venusport. A short distance ahead, a freight elevator was accepting the heavy cats one at a time and lifting them to the surface of the spaceport field. People were clamoring over the steel backs of the cats, shouting excitedly to one another over the deep rumble of turbine engines.

The man standing before Kim was a good six inches taller than he was. Moreover, Throwback Samson was solid muscle—broad shoulders, deep chest, and tremendous, rippling sinews. A wide belt about his thighs supported a loincloth, a holstered Maxim, and the curved, razor-edged scimitar Venus settlers preferred as a swamp-knife.

And he was certainly a throwback! He was the blackest man Kim had ever seen in his life. He was like a huge, grinning black shadow in the dim tunnel light. The whites of his eyeballs and the sparkling line of his teeth seemed to glow benevolently from his black, handsomely molded face.

Kim took a deep breath. "You're the man the Dark Watch recommended as a guide?" he asked, keeping his voice casual.

A deep chuckle rumbled up from Samson's chest, blending with the engine rumble of the big cats beside them. "I know every square inch of the known regions of Venus, plus a lot the maps say is unexplored!" he stated firmly. "And not by accident, either—I've taken mud-cats through some of the worst terrain on this planet. Dragged 'em out of salt-mires with every bolt on 'em half-corroded, tuned 'em up in the middle of the swamp and made 'em purr like kittens. Had to!"

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Kim grinned. "In other words, you know your way around!" he taunted good-naturedly. "But, listen—there may be fighting—"

Throwback dropped one eyebrow in a pained frown. "I see you haven't been on Venus long! Since when wasn't there a fight?"

"All right," Kim nodded. "As guide and scout, you'll ride Dimitrios' cat at the head of the column. But we aren't pulling out until morning, and I'd feel better if you could do something for us in the meantime. Can you get through the rebel lines?"

Throwback laughed. "At night, I'm the one man who can get *anywhere!* Why, though? Want me to slip out and check on that outlaw expedition?"

"That's the idea. Find out what they're doing, how many they are, what arms they have, if you can manage it. But don't take any more risks than you have to!"

"Don't worry," Throwback countered. "I probably know more about that than you do!"

Kim pursed his lips and nodded, grinning. "You probably do, at that! Don't be gone longer than midnight, though—we're pulling out early."

"Midnight it is!" Throwback gave a brief nod and moved with long, swinging strides toward the freight elevator. He turned and called back, "If I don't show up, Rothman, don't come after me! You would never make it—and I won't be alive!"

He picked up a helmet near the tunnel wall, clamped it over his shoulders, and rode up on the elevator with a rumbling mud-cat.

FOURTEEN men and nine women, all scientists of one sort or another. Heavy cases of scientific equipment. Twenty-five big mud-cats with their golden-skinned drivers. Plus arms, ammunition batteries, food supplies, distilled water, emergency oxygen tanks, medical supplies, turbine fuel, and spare parts for the cats. An expedition on Venus was no small matter.

The big cats crawled around in the mud to form a tight circle as they were lifted to the spaceport field. A sputtering arc-light was rigged in the middle of the circle, giving them light to work by. It was shielded by the cats from any spying eyes out on the far end of the field, where bright flashes and muffled blasts indicated the fighting was still going on.

The mud-cats were huge, metal behemoths looming up in the wet, misty blackness of the night. Kim walked around the inside of their perimeter, beating his fist into his palm and scowling through the cracks between them at the fathomless darkness. It was three hours past midnight.

Fourteen men, nine women in the expedition. Twenty-five drivers with the cats. Forty-eight people, plus Dimitrios, Fran, himself, and Throwback Samson, which made fifty-two.

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Explorers on an alien planet, with a travelling laboratory that had to be fought, pushed, and driven across that planet. Going out to make peace with an alien species of intelligent life that had already proven itself unfriendly, ferocious—

People stood in groups beside their cats, talking. People scrambled up over the shadowy backs of the cats, checking and securing the cables that held the great mounds of equipment lashed down under heavy tarpaulins. People like Kim, himself, wearing transparent filter-helmets over their heads, garbed now in the drab brown suits that covered them from neck to feet with a thin, tightly woven fabric that no insect's stinger could penetrate. Pistols and swamp-knives belted about their hips, Chavez rifles slung over their shoulders.

All of them there, now. All ready. Dimitrios had received the Governor's message that the rebels would let them through their lines at a specified time. And that time would arrive in another hour.

And all of them were there, ready —except one. Throwback Samson hadn't come back.

Kim stamped around the circle of cats, scowling and peering between them. Three hours past midnight and still no Samson. Kim felt a gnawing conscience that tore at his guts. Had he sent that big, handsome black man out to his death? If he had, by all the little satans in Hell, Black Dog Mac-Sneary would die slowly, inch by inch!

Kim paused in his nervous stride, just once. He stood looking across the lighted circle to where Fran stood leaning against the tall, mud-splattered flank of the cat they would ride. Before Fran, seated on a chunk of rock, was the tall, robed figure of Rabbi Rosenblum. His features were quietly intent within his helmet, and he was speaking calmly. And Fran was listening with a blush that set her cheeks aglow and a sparkle that shone in her eyes like scintillating flames. Her lips were curved in a soft, sweet smile . . .

Kim whirled and resumed his pent-up stride, slamming his fist against the steel side of a cat and scowling out into the dark night with a muttered curse.

He reached the narrow gap between two cats and slid to a halt, staring. The night out there was still a wet, misty blackness. And the huge, black figure standing there was almost invisible. Only the grin and the faint gleam of the helmet stood out.

"*Samson*!" Kim gasped. "Blast it man, you—"

A deep chuckle answered him, and Samson strode in past the cats with a supple, silent grace that gave an illusion that he came flowing out of the darkness. "I learned the time we would depart from the rebels," he explaind gently. "They're sure a talkative bunch, out there!"

"Let's go find Dimitrios and hear

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your report!" Kim turned and led the way over to the scientist's cat. "You've had me in a stew, fella!"

"I wanted to check on that MacSneary gang's movements up to the latest possible moment," Samson replied wth a casual lightness. "Around midnight, they must've learned the way the rebels were going to let us drive out of here. They posted gunners along the route with the idea of knocking off some of our cats, but when the rebel boss heard about it, he went over and shooed 'em out. Said he wasn't going to get his war messed up with no private squabbles on the side!"

Kim heaved a sigh of relief. "I was afraid they'd try something like that."

"They won't, now!" Samson said, chuckling. "Not unless they want to take on the whole rebel forces!"

Dimitrios saw the two men approaching through the glassite blister of the cat's cockpit. The scientist emerged, helmeted, through the tiny airlock and dropped to the ground to meet them. Kim made the introductions and Samson shook hands with him, cordially.

"Rothman said I'd ride with you," the tall scout said.

Dimitrios nodded. "Glad you'll be along, too, Samson! We'll certainly need you. Now, about that other group—"

"They've got around sixty men, all armed," Samson reported. "That includes the cat-drivers, though, who'll stick to their cats and have little to do with any private fights—which leaves about forty gunners to worry us. They have twenty cats fully provisioned for a long trip, plus six *ghrakko* dogs—"

"*Ghrakko* dogs?" Dimitrios blurted in surprise.

Samson nodded with an expression of disgust. "Some fool out there decided they'd buy their *ghrakko* mounts here. *Ghrakkos* are terrified by the swamps, and when they get them out in that green hell with those roaring mud-cats, those *ghrakko* dogs will go mad and tear their riders to pieces. I've seen it happen too often!"

Dimitrios grinned dourly. "Well, that's their worry! You've done a good job, Mr. Samson. We'll be pulling out in twenty minutes." He turned to Kim. "We'll be three days going through the Low Swamps, Rothman. The fourth day, we'll climb the High Slopes to Delaray's Mill—we'll buy our *ghrakko* dogs there! From then on, we'll be in unexplored country. Up through the Misty Mountains and down into the passes or valleys or whatever we find beyond. Got that?"

"Right," Kim said. I'd like to make a suggestion, though."

"Yes?"

"Samson reports that MacSneary gang has tried to lay ambush along our route out of here, but the rebels wouldn't allow it," Kim spoke grimly. "Pirates, though, have a tendency to ignore warnings, so there may be a few pot-shots at us any-

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how—"

Dimitrios frowned worriedly. "What's your suggestion?"

"Let my cat lead the column out of here," Kim replied. "If there's any ambush, I'll spot it. If there isn't, we'll go on through. Once my cat is clear of Venusport, I'll swing around and stand guard while you lead the rest of the column on past. Then I'll fall in behind and keep watch on our rear."

"Good idea!" Samson approved instantly.

"Go ahead," Dimitrios seconded. "Samson and I will fall in behind you." He swung toward the circle of cats and raised his voice to a shout. *"All right everybody! Mount up! March order!"*

Kim whirled and ran swiftly toward his own cat.

"I'M Winnetka!" the driver said, grinning, as the cat's turbine came to life with a muffled growl. "Winnetka Jones, that is!"

"Glad to know you, Jones!" Kim replied, clamping a Chavez rifle into the turret-mounts in the roof of the cockpit blister. "Soon as she's warmed up, pull out! We're leading the column out of Venusport!"

"Oh-oh!" Jones murmured, gazing back and up at the mounted rifle. "I hope you're a good shot with that thing! If anybody starts shooting at us, hang on—I'll have this cat skinning itself all over Venus!"

"He's a good shot, all right!" Fran consoled Jones. She looked under them!

at Kim, gravely. "Trouble, darling?"

"Maybe!" Kim strapped himself to the bucket seat in the turret. "If there is, we'll be ready for it."

"All set?" Jones spoke sharply over the rising thunder of the turbines.

"All set!" Fran and Kim chorused.

The cat bit its flanged treads into the mud and lurched forward.

"Fran!" Kim shouted above the roar. "Man the searchlights! Keep 'em sweeping all around us!"

Fran twisted in her seat to obey. Three searchlight beams shot out at opposing angles from the mud-cat, as she manipulated the lever handles. Jones studied the map tacked to its board beside his control panel, peered ahead through his periscope slit, and altered the cat's direction toward the far end of the field. There was one certain path they had to follow through the rebel lines . . .

Kim looked back over the top of the lurching, roaring cat to see the other cats swinging into a long column behind them, like huge, ferocious monsters charging across the field, flinging mud up from their terrible claws. He pulled the lever that turned the turret around and gazed ahead into the inky blackness to the long line of tiny, blazing flashes that was rapidly approaching. Jones would have to hit their predetermined path through that No Man's Land exactly, or they would have their cat blasted out from un-

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He did. They toppled off the edge of the level spaceport field and went charging down a shallow, crater-pocked draw. The bright flashes of exploding beams swept past at a good distance on either side of them. The cat's roving lights picked out mud-caked, blue-uniformed Space Fleet troopers clutching rifles and crouching behind their force-screen projector shields. Then the gully flattened out to a small plain that was torn and gashed to a hellish rubble. Then they bounded over a slight rise and roared past crouching figures of mud-splattered, half-naked rebel troops.

Another figure, an armed rebel standing erect, loomed before them, waving them to the left. Jones hauled the big cat around, spraying the rebel with mud, and they went thundering along a smooth, winding road. Settlers' huts, sealed prefab domes, began to appear on either side of the road. They were through the battle zone, now, driving on through the outer suburbs of Venusport. Kim checked his rifle and watched, tensely, as the searchlight beams played over the dark, silent huts. They thundered onward.

At twenty yard intervals, the other cats followed them.

They roared past the last prefab dome and struck the muddy deep-rutted lane beyond. Giant blue fronds rose from glistening, black pools of water on either side of them. The cat bounced and shuddered over buried [illegible] shallow holes in the lane. It curved around and went up the steep shoulder of a black, lava-coated hill.

"Swing off and stop at the crest of this hill!" Kim shouted. Jones nodded mutely. Then, with a merry grin, he struck a switch that cut in the exhaust mufflers, and the turbines' roar faded to a deep, throbbing rumble.

"Sometimes loud noise can sure unnerve anybody trying to take a shot at you!" he remarked calmly.

Kim stared down at him, then muttered a pleased oath.

As the purplish fronds dropped away and they crawled up the steep shoulder of the hill, Kim motioned Fran to douse their lights. He gazed back down the way they had come, counting the lights of the other cats. All twenty-five were still rolling. He gave a sigh of relief and loosened his seat straps.

Steel treads champing at the flinty soil, the cat hauled itself up on the crest of the hill and spun around to the side of the trail. Morning light was painting the dense cloud-blanket overhead a deep, shadowy blue which brightened to a blazing green glow off near the invisible horizon. There were dim, gray shadows of giant mountains etched within the mists—towering, flat-topped chimney peaks rising hundreds of miles into the cloud-shrouded heavens.

And below was the slick, brown scum of the Low Swamps, patterned with broad patches of dark blue

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dense, black swamp jungle. In the misty distance, other islands were dimly visible—islands of jagged, volcanic cones that spouted red glares of molten rock and poisonous fumes into the clouds.

And up the narrow trail, curving around the shoulder of the hill, came the roaring, lurching monsters from Earth. The big, steel mud-cats snarling up out of the night's gloom, bulging humps of supplies and equipment lashed to their high backs, cockpit blisters agleam. Kim caught the wave of Dimitrios' hand as his cat went thundering past; then the others followed, leaping, jolting, roaring.

The domed city of Venusport was lost somewhere in the wall of mists behind them.

The Gep Tzong Country

KIM sat cross-legged on a high ledge.

The ledge was up on the brush-choked flank of a peak that disappeared into the orange-red clouds overhead. The clouds were so low they seemed almost close enough to touch.

Below was a deep gash between towering rock walls. The floor was crammed with jumbled boulders and twisted, gnarled trees.

The gash opened out on a broad valley. Beyond the valley were smaller peaks, like broken teeth, with orange clouds being torn to shreds on their black pinnacles by fierce hurricane winds.

Kim sat perfectly still, his helmet gleaming dully on his head, his rifle laid across his lap. He had been sitting there for the past two hours.

That kind of patience wasn't learned easily. Kim had learned it, in the past two weeks. He was toughened to it. His body beneath the drab brown coverall was solid and lean, with flat, hard muscles.

Before the muscles developed, there had been callouses; before the callouses, these had been aches and blisters. The pain of being slammed and jolted around in the steel confines of a lurching mud-cat. The strain of hard, bitter, merciless work.

They had crossed the swamplands of Venus. Dimitrios, in the lead cat, shooting flame-jelly into the rough lane ahead to burn out the persistent, tough creeping-vines of the jungle. The big cats wallowing ahead through the syrupy mud, plowing through the burning vegetation. The mud coated them thickly and was baked hard by the heat; it had to be chipped away in curved sheets from the transparent cockpit blisters. Swarms of angry insects rose from the fetid water, darkened the burning sky with their black cloud, and descended on the lumbering cats; the drivers snapped on the ultra-sonic sirens to frighten the insects away. At night, the convoy camped on high ground, while giant carnivores screamed and bellowed and crashed through the surrounding jungle.

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Some days, it rained. The rain swept over them in solid curtains, and the water swirled up to the backs of the cats. But the cats rolled on. Occasionally, a cat would slip off the trail and sink into the bottomless mire; two other cats would be coupled together, then would haul the bogged cat back on the trail with their winch-cables. Then the convoy would move on.

Fran was at home. She prepared the meals for Kim and Winnetka Jones, and spent the rest of her time educating them on the flora and fauna of Venus, the planet of her birth. Her knowledge was extensive, scientific, and accurate, so that even Jones listened. She pointed out the tracks of various animals to them, the swamp groves of certain plantation crops. There were certain plants on Venus which, when mashed to a pulp and processed, gave certain juices that were nutritious to Earthmen; the juices were used as a base for various synthetic foods, which made up most of the staple diet of the Venusian settlers. The water, too, was drinkable—when processed and distilled.

They climbed up out of the swamps, onto the slopes of the Misty Mountains. Three cats broke down as the going got tougher, slippery and rocky; the convoy stopped until the cats were repaired.

At their camp sites, Kim became more and more attached to the tall scout, Throwback Samson. Kim was fairly certain that the other expedition would be somewhere behind them, following them in the trail they had blazed conveniently clear. But as nights passed, Kim and Throwback formed a habit of slipping out of the camp together, vanishing out into the stygian darkness and not returning until hours later. Once, when they returned, Throwback got an oily rag from one of the cat-drivers, handed it to Kim, and stood by with a silent grin as Kim wiped the clotted blood from the blade of his swamp-knife.

They were roaring, sliding, and spinning their tracks in the loose shale of a steep slope, one morning, when Dimitrios' voice blared from their radios: *"Cut your turbines and sit still! Remain in your cats and —above all—don't shoot!"*

And a huge, slate-gray reptile came waddling over the hill. Fifty feet high and two hundred feet along its spiked back, with small beady eyes in its bucket-shaped head and dragging itself along on huge, taloned claws. It spotted something —a purplish root—under one of the cats in the middle of the column, waddled up, and nudged the cat with its horny snout.

Somebody in a cat ahead got nervous. A Chavez beam lanced out and tore a boulder to smithereens behind the great beast.

It jerked its snout up and looked straight at the offending cat, speculatively.

"Stop firing," Dimitrios shouted into the radios. *"Don't fire again or*

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it'll tear us all to pieces!"

The monster lowered its snout toward the offensive cat and sniffed, very deliberately. Spouts of white steam shot from its nostrils. Then, apparently satisfied, it turned back to the other cat and nudged it gently. The great snout nudged the cat right over on its side, then a long, grayish tongue flicked out and tore the purple root right out of the ground.

Then, fed as well as satisfied, the reptile waddled sedately on down the slope, creating a minor avalanche of boulders.

The column wound up its turbines again and two cats winched the overturned cat back onto its treads. The convoy moved on.

They met the stocky, tough miller and his beautiful wife at Delaray's Mill, where the plantation crops were pulped and processed. The miller listened to their story, then shook his head. "Gep Tzong are animals!" he said flatly. "Kill 'em on sight!"

Dimitrios didn't like that. He called Kim aside in a private conference. Thereafter, it was decided, the expedition would move straight into the Gep Tzong country, in broad daylight, without any show of furtiveness or hesitation. The Gep Tzong had been attacked by unthinking settlers and were undoubtedly in an angry mood; any sign of craftiness or guile would probably bring an immediate attack down on the expedition. A forthright approach would have the best chance of bringing them down for a talk instead of a massacre.

They bought six *ghrakko* mounts for scouting purposes at Delaray's Mill, and moved on. A week later, they were deep in the Misty Mountains—and in unexplored country.

Then Throwback found the webbed tracks.

"War party!" he had said, glumly. "Marching in files. Soldiers."

SOMETHING moved on the jumbled floor far below. Kim shifted his rifle forward and flattened on on he top of the ledge.

Like a tiny, crawling insect, a *ghrakko* dog came loping up into the deep gash from the valley beyond. Gradually, as it approached, Kim discerned the rider sitting atop the grotesque hump of its shoulders. A tall figure garbed in drab brown. Throwback Samson.

Kim climbed to his feet, slung the rifle over his shoulder, and scrambled down from the ledge. He walked back to a sleek, blue-gray *ghrakko* dog standing in the dense brush nearby, its jawful of fanged teeth strapped shut by the muzzling bridle. It dropped to its knees as he tugged the reins, and he climbed up into the hard saddle on its shoulder-hump. Then it scrambled up and picked its way down the narrow trail on the steep face of the cliff.

Webbed tracks meant the Gep Tzong. And two men had said the Gep Tzong were intelligent. The last

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one—DuBois Thompson—had described the twenty years he had lived among them as a captive. In his carefully written report, he had told of their village far back in the Misty Mountains, of their gray, toad-like appearance, of their rites and legends.

Their legends had the same savage blood-thirstiness of any tribe of barbarians on Earth. They believed they were descendants of a group of gods who had come down from the mountain-tops and built a temple. Those gods had placed the sacred metal in the temple to guard it, had given birth to the first children of the Gep Tzong, and had died soon afterward—all but one. There was one who could not speak, and he had built fire and taught the first children. He was tall and thin and was a great god. But he had died.

And when DuBois Thompson was captured, he had been tall and thin. But he spoke. So they cut out his tongue and made him a god. And he had seen the tall, black tower of their temple, but they would not let him enter it because the sacred metal would kill him. Finally, he had fashioned a makeshift filter-mask and had escaped. He had walked back through the mountains and down the slopes and across the swamplands to Venusport.

Indeed, Kim thought grimly, *he too was a great god!*

Samson hailed him as his mount came scampering down the narrow cliff trail. Kim reined it around on the rocky floor and went loping to meet the tall scout.

"Find anything?" he asked.

"Found plenty!" Samson replied emphatically. "Followed the tracks down into the valley we came through yesterday. MacSneary's column is camped down there!"

"It was a scouting patrol?"

Samson shook his head. "My guess is it was a full-fledged war party. It missed us by only a couple of miles, coming through here before we arrived. From the looks of the tracks, it circled MacSneary's column, keeping out of sight and watching it. Then they held a council, probably decided there weren't enough of 'em to attack MacSneary's bunch, and they trotted on back into the mountains."

"Think they went back for reinforcements?"

"Right. Or they may stir up the whole tribe!" Samson scowled bitterly. "If they should come storming out of there, looking for blood, and should stumble onto our expedition instead of MacSneary's—" He left the rest unsaid.

Kim nodded thoughtfully. "We'd better get back and warn the others—though there may be a chance they were just curious—"

"Uh-uh!" Samson refuted. "Maybe at first, but not any more! MacSneary's bunch spotted one of 'em—blasted him all over the landscape!"

"That," Kim snapped, "is all we needed! Come on!"

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They whipped their mounts on through the narrow gash that penetrated the wall of the mountains to another valley, higher up. The dogs were filmed with sweat and blowing through foam-flecked nostrils as they trotted out onto a gentle slope overlooking the valley. Sheer cliffs rose on all sides, vanishing into the orange mists overhead. The grass at this higher altitude, though, was more blue-green than purple, and the trees had rough brown trunks and greenish leaves instead of the soggy blue trunks and black fuzz-tops of the swamp jungles.

They took a winding ravine down the crumbling side of a deep pocket in the center of the valley, letting their dogs walk and catch their breath. The dogs' breathing was labored in the thin air of these higher valleys.

They zig-zagged through a clump of tall green trees to a small, clear brook that came splashing out of the rocky cut of a small side-ravine when Kim suddenly drew rein. Samson pulled up beside him and they sat staring silently at the saddled *ghrakko* dog standing on the other side of the stream, its reins tied to a tree. It gazed back at them, placidly.

Samson voiced his question in one single word. "Who?"

"No telling," Kim replied softly. "Our camp isn't far below here. Maybe one of our people, or maybe MacSneary's got scouts out

"We'll see," Samson said.

They pulled their mounts back into the trees, dismounted, and tied them. Then the two men slipped silently back to the narrow cleft of the side-ravine. Cautiously, melting from shadow to shadow, gliding from bush to boulder to tree, rifles held ready. Samson pointed to the tracks of the other rider, followed them up into the narrow cleft where water gurgled merrily over the rocks. The two men went over rocks, too—belly-flat, like creeping lizards. They paused, listening, as a faint splash and rippling of water came from up ahead. Then they snaked forward into dense, tangled brush, inched through it on their elbows and toes, and reached out and parted the leaves very carefully.

They stiffened with amazement.

THE side-ravine had widened out to form a small, steep-walled hollow. A misty waterfall fell smoke-white from the far wall, hissing into a wide, deep pool. There was a small, rough boulder outcropping that jutted up in the center of the pool.

Fran Freemont was poised gracefully on the tip of the rock. She was a lovely, ivory-skinned figure with long, dark hair that rippled wetly down her back. She wore only a scant G-string and a bra—her brown coverall and gun-holster was folded neatly and placed over on the sandy edge of the pool. As she poised her

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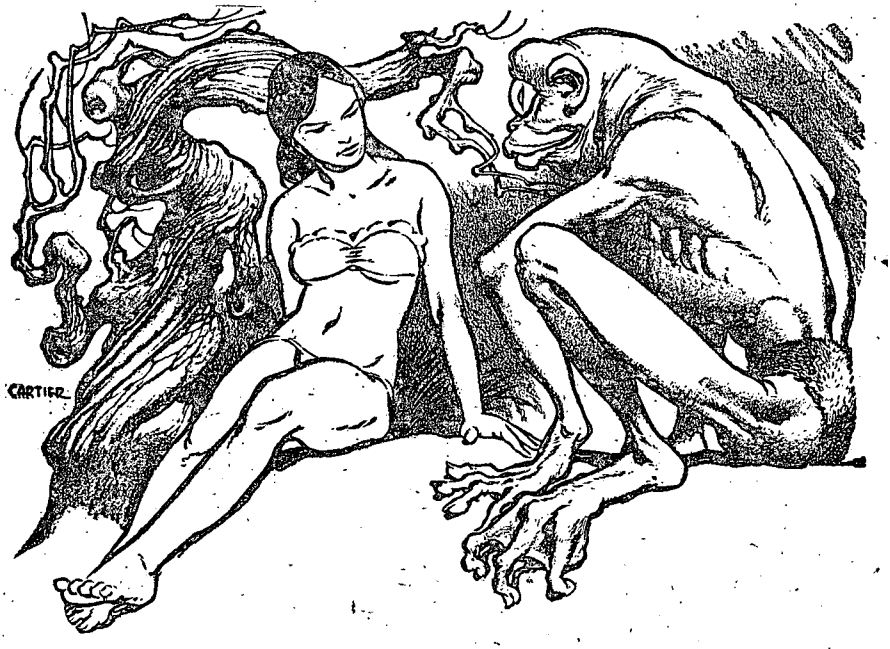

plete, selfish pleasure.

And *she wore no helmet!*

Then, with a flash of ivory limbs, she arched out in a graceful dive and plunged neatly into the water, hardly making a splash.

And on the far side of the pool, squatting on the sands behind her, was a strange, toad-like creature with a glossy gray skin.

It had watched her, silently. Obviously without her knowledge that it was even there. It had followed her graceful dive with large, staring eyes. It was completely motionless, as though hypnotized with utter fascination.

Studying the Gep Tzong with a fascination of his own, Kim saw that it was actually a "he" — it had a thin, furry string about its, or rather, his, loins. A cruelly barbed spear lay on the sand beside him. He looked a great deal like a giant, gray toad. His arms and legs were thin, his hips narrow. But his chest was a huge, bulbous bladder that ballooned almost to his chin. His face was creased by a wide, thick-lipped mouth stretching from ear to ear, and two large, liquid eyes stared from either side of a short, stubby nose. And he was bald. Bald and a dark, glossy gray.

Fran's head broke the surface and she rolled on her back, breathing easily.

The Toad Man opened his wide

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slit of a mouth and issued a long, whispering sigh.

At that moment, Fran saw him.

She dog-paddled gently, staring up at him. The Toad Man stared back at her. Neither of them uttered a sound.

Then, cautiously, the Toad Man moved. He inched down to the edge of the pond and extended one webbed foot toward the water. He stared at Fran, his foot poised. Then he dipped his foot into the water.

He jerked it out, instantly, and retreated back to his squatting position.

And Fran gave a soft, tinkling laugh.

That brought results. The Toad Man's lips twitched into a puzzled, sheepish expression.

"No sink!" he said. Quite clearly, too.

Fran gasped. "*What?*"

The Toad Man stirred irritably. "You no sink!" he said.

"Well-l-l-l!" Fran exclaimed, sighing. "Hello there!"

And the Toad Man grinned. "Hello," he said. "You no sink!"

"You—you speak our language!" Fran exclaimed rather foolishly.

Toad Man's grin broadened. "Me priest man," he explained proudly. "Me say godman talk. Make godman god, no talk. Me talk for god."

"Oh—you mean Thompson!" Fran remarked pensively.

"Thom'son!" the Toad Man agreed. "Good god-man. Show people how make hum-boxes work!"

Fran paddled up to the shallow water before him, touched bottom, and stood hip-deep in the water, arms akimbo, her hands on her slim thighs. "What's a hum-box?" she asked brightly.

"Hum-box make hum," explained the Toad Man. "Make cold. Make hot. Cook for meat, no fire."

"A stove?"

The Toad Man blinked owlishly, then shrugged. "Low fella got hum-box," he said. "More better than fire. Low fella you, more white. People go for hum-box. Low fella kill."

Fran grimaced with horror. "You went down there just to get stoves — electric plates — and they shot you!" she exclaimed timorously. "Like—like you were *animals!*"

"Low fella stick make light," the Toad Man said flatly. "Light make boom. People dead."

"You poor thing!" Fran murmured in a soft, hurt tone. And with that, she waded right out of the pool, sat down beside the Toad Man, and put a comforting arm around his shoulders. "You poor thing—"

And then, quite unexpectedly, the Toad Man puckered his broad lips, turned, and gave her a resounding kiss.

Fran stumbled backward and sat down, hard. "*Well!*" she exclaimed.

It was then that Kim's uncontrolled laughter came braying from the brush across the pool.

The Toad Man stiffened instantly, whirled, and grabbed up his spear.

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Then he was a gray blur of movement, vanishing up the rocky wall. He was gone in seconds.

Samson rose to his feet, rifle cradled on his arm. "They sure do move fast!" he remarked thoughtfully.

Kim rolled down out of the brush and sat on the other side of the pool, holding his sides and laughing. He stared across at Fran, stammering with mirth, "Thuh-the *expression on your f-face!*"

Then he roared with laughter.

Fran got up and brushed the sand off her wet bottom with a grim deliberation. She had been on a frontier world for quite some time, now, and had learned words that hadn't been heard on Earth for decades. Firmly and heatedly, she began to use them.

She used all of them, with sharp effectiveness. Kim and Samson listened with a frank, open-mouthed admiration.

When she had finally exhausted her new-found vocabulary, she marched around the pool and began struggling wetly into her brown coverall.

Kim asked, in a cautious murmur, "Where's your helmet?"

"Didn't wear one!" she snapped back. Then, with a hard tug on her coverall zipper, she explained, "Dimitrios thought the air up here might be breathable — Thompson said he lived up here without a filter-helmet, remember? So they made some tests. Dimitrios says that the poisonous gasses are either so hot they stay up in the cloud-blanket or are so heavy they sink down to the Low Swamps. It's breathable, up here, because the mountains shelter these valleys."

"Speaking of Dimitrios," Samson reminded, "we'd better get moving! Those Gep Tzong won't take forever to come storming back this way!"

"If you two hadn't horned in," Fran flared angrily, "I'd have made *friends* with him!"

"You certainly would!" Kim taunted mildly. "But we aren't talking about that one, Fran." He stood up and slung his rifle over his shoulder. "Samson's right," he added. Let's get moving."

Attack!

THEY squatted on the hard-packed ground beside Dimitrios' cat, while their *ghrakko* dogs drowsed in the shadow of the nearby trees, and Kim, Throwback and Fran made their reports.

Dimitrios nodded grimly. "We've got four people down with fungus-fever, too," he told them. "Maybe this fresh, breathable air up here will help them." None of them wore their helmets, nor did anyone in the bustling camp around them.

Kim puffed on a cigarette and drew lines in the dirt with his forefinger. "The MacSneary bunch is here," he said. "The Gep Tzong are here. We're in the middle. The Gep Tzong are mad at the MacSneary

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bunch."

"Q.e.d., we've got to get *out* of the middle!" Samson quipped wryly. "There's another valley up above here. We go up this valley and over a pass between two chimney-peaks. I'll scout ahead."

"And I want four good men on our other *ghrakko* mounts with me," Kim said. "We've got to cover our tracks, and it'll be plenty of work."

Dimitrios nodded again.

They moved. That night, Kim led his weary riders into the new camp in the next valley. Fran brought him his dinner and stood beside him as he wolfed it down. Then he crawled into their cat, mumbled "hello" to Winnetka Jones, and fell into his bunk.

Fran shook him awake in the darkness. "Samson's outside," she whispered. "He wants to see you."

Kim crawled out of his bunk and eased his tired, worn body down from the cat. A small campfire sputtered in the cool early morning darkness, with people clustered silently around it. Kim strode over and clapped Samson on the shoulder. "What's up?"

Samson peered around at him. Kim started. The handsome, black features were almost gray with pallor.

"They moved through the valley behind us!" the tall scout exclaimed huskily. "Over three thousand of 'em, Kim! They marched right through like a well-trained army, just before nightfall!"

"Did they get our trail?"

Samson shook his head. "I couldn't tell," he whispered. The whites of his eyes showed plainly in the darkness. "Lordy! Three thousand against sixty, Kim! In this pitch-black Venus night—"

Kim reached out and gripped the big man's arm, tightly. "I'll go with you," he said. "We'll follow them and see what happened. We'll find out which way the Gep Tzong are coming back—"

Fran brought a saddled *ghrakko* dog for him. Then, when it kneeled down, she had to boost him into the saddle. She didn't say a word, but simply kissed him, quickly, before the dog scrambled to its feet. Dimitrios came up with saddlebags of food and canteens of water. Then they were off, loping through the dark night. The rolling, jarring stride of the dogs soon jolted Kim into complete wakefulness.

They found MacSneary's cats at noon. The cats were parked in a night-camp circle in the middle of a small blue-grass valley.

"Lordy!" Samson muttered. "Came down out o' the night and crawled right into their cats with 'em! Sentries posted on watch must've been cut down without a sound!"

One of the cats' turbines was rumbling softly. Kim dismounted and climbed inside, ignoring the limp corpses sprawled grotesquely on their bunks. A few minutes later, the turbine stopped. He climbed down and, following a thin

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black power-cable off into a clump of trees nearby. Samson followed him, leading the dogs.

The dogs began to snort and paw at the ground before they reached the trees. Then a variant breeze brought them the smell.

Kim stood silently at the edge of the trees, gazing in among them. "They learned how to rig an electric heating-coil, too," he remarked hoarsely.

There was a large, bald head with a luxurious black beard. There were three other heads—a blonde, a brunette, and a redhead. They protruded from the ground like ripe, red melons with hair. They were close together, in a bunch, where the four bodies had been buried to the neck in a hole, with a heating-coil wound around them and the dirt packed in solidly. They were thoroughly roasted.

IT was late night when the two scouts rode back into their own camp. They almost fell from the saddles of the kneeling dogs. Firm, gentle hands helped them over to the campfire and handed them steaming plates of food and mugs of coffee.

"The tracks don't turn back," Kim croaked wearily. "We followed them long enough to make sure. The Gep Tzong have gone on down to the High Slopes—to the swamp plantations—"

"You mean," Dimitrios asked, "they passed up the MacSneary columns?"

"MacSneary's dead," Samson replied curtly. "They're all dead."

By morning, the convoy was on the move again. Kim slept the deep sleep of exhaustion in his bunk, oblivious of the lurching, jolting ride.

When he finally awakened, it was nightfall again and the cats were parked in a camp.

The first thing he noticed as he climbed down from the cat was that all their cats weren't there. He paused, counting the big vehicles in the circle. There were twenty. Five were missing.

Fran came running from the crowd gathered about the campfire. She grabbed him and kissed him. "Samson's over at the fire! He's in charge now," she explained breathlessly.

Kim strode over and looked around the circle of faces at the fire. "Five cats are gone," he said gruffly. "And Dimitrios. Why?"

"They went ahead," Samson spoke from across the fire. "With the Gep Tzong on the warpath, Dimitrios didn't want to risk all of us. He's gone on with five cats to see if he can find the Gep Tzong village before their main body gets back."

"And if he doesn't come back, we return to Venusport?"

Samson nodded silently.

Fran nudged Kim, handed him a steaming plate and mug. Kim squatted beside the fire and gulped the food down, hungrily.

Dimitrios, he concluded, had gone ahead with as few scientific members

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of the expedition as he'd thought he needed. Kim and Samson were left behind with the rest to guide them back to Venusport—and to see that they got there! It was a sound strategic move.

Then, over coffee and cigarette, Kim remembered something else. "Radio can't reach over these mountains!" he said pensively. "How do we keep in contact?"

Samson grinned in defeat. "Dimitrios took all our mounts but one," he said. "He'll send riders back to report, regularly." Then he sobered, knowing what Kim's next question would be.

"When was the first rider due back?"

"At nightfall. He isn't here yet."

Kim scowled darkly. "If he isn't here by morning, I'm riding after them!"

The rider didn't appear, so mid-morning found Kim riding up the steep trail that skirted the ridge of a gigantic chimney-peak. The tracks of the five-cats were easy to follow, but the *ghrakko* dog snorted and trembled beneath him, and climbed wearily, with long, wheezing breaths.

They reached a narrow valley that was perched on the sheer flank of the peak, like an immense ledge. Torn wisps of crimson fog lay close to the ground. Above, the orange-red cloud-blanket glowered like the landscape of Hell turned upside-down. The valley-on-a-ledge curved around to where the peak's flank joined a neighboring peak, and there was a deep, narrow gap through the rock. There were other tracks beside the cat-tread tracks, too. Thousands of web-footed tracks.

Kim was thrown clear when the *ghrakko* dog collapsed. It rolled over, breathing with great, wheezing gasps. Kim climbed to his feet, pulled his rifle out of the sand, and put the dog out of its misery with a well-aimed shot. Then he trudged onward, afoot.

He rounded a bend in the narrow gap and almost stumbled into the rear cat in the column. A cat-driver glanced back, then raised a shout. Dimitrios came running from the head of the column.

"Kim!" he exclaimed. "I might've known you'd show up!"

"Why aren't you farther ahead?" Kim retorted. "I didn't expect to catch up with you before night!"

The scientist trotted up, stopped, and shook his head. "Had to go slow," he gasped. "Our dogs couldn't take it. Want to keep 'em, if we can. Where's yours?"

"Keeled over, back there." Kim grimaced. "What's holding you up, now?"

Dimitrios gestured toward the front of the column. "Come up here and I'll show you!"

Kim followed him up to the first cat, stared as Dimitrios stopped and pointed ahead.

On the sandy floor between the sheer walls of the gap stood a large brazier of hammered bronze. Coals flamed white-hot in its open pan.

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A dense cloud of oily blue smoke boiled up from it, completely obscuring the end of the gap.

It stood about four hundred yards ahead of the cats.

"We reached here less than an hour ago," Dimitrios commented in hushed tones. "We've been waiting for it to burn out, but it hasn't. I think someone's feeding it fresh coals from the other side!"

"In that case," Kim replied, "the only thing to do is go down and look!" He checked the settings on his Chavez rifle and sauntered ahead, toward the smoke-spewing brazier.

"Careful!" Dimitrios called after him. "We'll cover you. If you see anything—get back here!"

"Uh huh," Kim grunted. He strode onward.

THERE wasn't a sound, save his boots crunching in the coarse sand. As he approached the brazier, he noted that it was as tall as he was, shaped like a huge, bronze urn. Its sides were inscribed with weird etchings.

The walls rose sheer and blank on either side. Ahead, there was only the brazier and its dense cloud of blue smoke billowing upward.

Then he heard it. Far off, somewhere. A faint rumbling sound, like thunder. He froze in his tracks, instantly.

Then the rumbling grew to a vast roar that shook the ground beneath him, that jerked him around to gaze upward in horror.

High on the walls of the gap, hundreds of feet above the cats, great masses of rock were breaking loose, crumbling, hurtling downward. Kim waved his arms and shouted frantically, but his shouts were lost in the tremendous roar. He could see Dimitrios standing before the lead cat, staring at him in puzzlement. The scientist's brown figure stood out sharply against the cat's blunt, blackened prow . . .

Then a vast cloud of swirling dust enveloped him. Swallowed him, the cats, the whole end of the gap. There was a mighty blast of sound and concussion that threw Kim to his knees.

The dust billowed up gently, revealing vague glimpses of the great pile of jagged, broken rock that completely filled the gap.

Kim stumbled to his feet with a sob.

A shrill, shrieking cry swung him back toward the huge brazier. He stood swaying, staring drunkenly, as a withering mass of gray, toad-like bodies came storming around the bronze urn, running straight toward him.

The Chavez seemed to come up in his hands of its own accord. Its dazzling bolts licked out, struck the onsurging mass, blasted great gaps in their ranks, exploded torn, mangled bodies against the sheer walls. But they came on.

Kim threw down the Chavez in disgust and whipped out his Maxims. The beams lanced out from his

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fists, ripped open bulbous, gray chests. Toad-like bodies began to pile up before him. They piled four-deep right up to his boots. Then the gray hordes from behind them came swarming over, slamming into him, throwing him back onto the sand. Hard fists pummelled him, crashed against his head, beat him senseless. The squirming gray mass became a roaring blackness. . . . .

ONE thing had impressed him. As he had blown the glossy gray shapes apart, their flesh and blood had been revealed as a bright, wet scarlet. Like human blood. And they were mammals.

He lay there, thinking about that for awhile. Until he realized that he had regained consciousness.

He was staring up at a ceiling of straight, slender poles chinked with mud. It was the ceiling of a small, low room, and the walls were of some woven matting.

A sharp twinge of pain lanced through his skull as he raised his head. He saw that he was sprawled on a low pallet of furry skins and there was a gray, toadlike female squatting just inside the narrow doorway. Then dizziness overcame him and he slumped back with a groan.

A tremendous, throbbing ache seemed to permeate his whole body. He lay in a daze, hardly aware of his surroundings.

A short while later—it may have been hours—he felt something being forced between his lips. Cool, refreshing liquid spilled into his throat. He swallowed painfully.

Later, he slept.

The gray, half-naked woman seemed never to leave the room. As Kim's strength came back, he began to notice that daylight and darkness passed outside the doorway, and he guessed that he was in a small hut. The Gep Tzong woman cooked his meals on a small brazier, fed him, and packed hot, foul-smelling black mud on the livid cuts and bruises on his body. She cleaned the hut every morning. She slept while squatting beside the doorway, leaning back against the wall. She made a few efforts at speech, at first, in a harsh, gutteral language; then she lapsed into silence.

Kim felt the strength flowing back into his limbs as the pain left him. His bruises vanished, and the woman packed mud onto fewer and fewer cuts.

But he never attempted to stir from his pallet. He never spoke once. Only when the woman's back was turned would he move his arms and legs, flexing and massaging his sore muscles.

He listened attentively to the sounds outside the hut. Footsteps padding past, gutteral voices. Firelight flickered through the doorway at night, and there was the monotonous, booming thunder of the drums. Every night, they lulled him to sleep.

Finally, he had a visitor. A Gep Tzong man stepped into the hut one

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morning and dismissed the woman with a jerk of his head. He came over, and stood above Kim, staring down at him.

"God-man no speak!" he intoned harshly.

Kim lay motionless, making no reply.

The Toad Man grinned broadly. "God-man speak! Me hear speak!" he exclaimed happily. "God-man play no speak. Play sick!"

Still, Kim didn't utter a sound.

The Toad Man whirled and stalked out. The woman slipped back into the hut, instantly.

That night, the gutteral voices were louder. And the drums boomed faster. Kim lay on his pallet, staring out at the darkness, watching the firelight reflection leap and dance on the hut's dirt floor. He licked his lips, nervously, shot repeated glances at the woman. But she merely squatted by the door, seeming to doze.

Then they came for him.

Glistening, gray bodies crowding in through the doorway, boney hands grasping him, roughly, bearing him from the pallet. They half-dragged, half-carried him from the hut. And the drums increased their pace to an insane, booming thunder.

Then they released him, left him standing weakly. And there was silence. Tense, heavy silence.

He was standing before a broad clearing. Meat roasted on the spits over a great fire blazing at the far end of the clearing. Between him and the fire, naked, gray people sat in two long rows, facing each other. Between the rows were heaped baskets of fruit, jugs, vases, bowls, and platters of steaming food. Their heads were all turned toward him, staring at him with their large, liquid eyes.

Staring through him, beyond him. At something behind him.

Slowly, Kim turned.

Behind him was a high stone dais. Mounted on the dais was a stout wooden pillory. There were leather straps on the pillory to bind a man's hands and arms. And between them were other straps, fashioned like a muzzle for an animal. A muzzle that would hold a man's head still and bind his jaws wide open so they could reach in and grasp his tongue.

Kim moved with blinding speed, snatched a barbed spear from the nearest warrior, and charged through them. Instantly, the mass of gray bodies surged over him, bearing him to the ground. Voices raised in gutteral shrieks and the drums boomed triumphantly. They lifted him to their shoulders, carried him up on the dais, and bound his arms to the pillory.

Then they stepped back, grinning. They hadn't bound the muzzle over his head. They waited for him to speak. To scream.

Temple of the Toad Men.

AS the darkness faded to the deep purple gloom of morning, Kim saw the village. It was a

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wild cluster of thousands of mud-roofed huts beyond the clearing.

His wrists stung with pain. His arms ached numbly. Blood clotted the straps binding them. He had long since stopped straining, giving it up with exhausted resignation. As the purple twilight gathered, he was ready to become their god.

The fire had died to glowing embers on the far side of the clearing. The air was cool and still. The long night was past. Gutteral voices had chanted, drums had boomed, and the Gep Tzong had feasted well. Hundreds of them were sprawled out in the clearing, snoring with a drunken, well-fed contentment.

It had been a ceremonial feast in their god-man's honor. When they awakened, Kim knew, the ceremony would resume. There was a small brazier glowing on the stone dais before him. A large, wooden pincers lay beside the brazier. And in the smoldering coals lay a thin, sharp dagger, its blade glowing white-hot.

He could look at it almost without shuddering now. The pain wouldn't be too bad, he reasoned; it wouldn't last more than a few days. Then he would be their god! Maybe he could do something for them, something that would end this era of horror.

The sky deepened to a dark, smoky violet and he could see beyond the village. He could see the dark forests cloaking the slopes of their valley and the dim, naked walls of the mountains that hemmed it.

And then he could see their temple. He was sure it was that. It stood up against the foot of a steep cliff rising behind their village. It was a tall tower, jet black, pointing upward several hundred feet to a sharp, tapered point. A stone stairway cut into the face of the cliff extended upward to a round, dark opening in the side of the tower.

This was the temple of the sacred metal. The temple where their gods went to die.

Kim stared down at the sleeping, gray figures and waited. It would be over quickly enough, he thought. It wouldn't take long. And then—

He felt a cold, icy touch against his right arm. He turned his head and—stared, wide-eyed. A curved, steel blade was sawing carefully through the leather straps. Kim uttered a choking, strangled gasp.

"Quiet, darling!" a voice whispered behind him.

He clamped his mouth shut to keep from shouting. He trembled violently.

The straps fell away and his numbed arms flopped at his sides. Then Fran's slender, soft figure slipped around the pillory and caught him before he fell. She gave a faint, whimpering sob as he leaned heavily against her. She helped him down from the dais and across the clearing into the trees.

"Please, Kim!" she murmured beseechingly. "You've got to walk! I—I can't carry you, darling!"

Kim felt a sudden blazing anger

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surge up through him. He straightened up, his mouth twisting with hatred, and swung back toward the clearing. Fran grabbed him, clung to him. "Kim, no! We've got to get away! Kim—"

"Not—yet!" His voice grated in his throat. He pulled her arms from his neck, pushed her aside. As she stumbled back, he saw that Maxim pistols were belted to her thighs. A Chavez was slung over her shoulder and a small knapsack was strapped to her back.

He reached out and pulled the Chavez from her shoulder, checked its settings, and slung it over his own.

"Temple!" he said thickly. "Treasure—we get that!"

The anger burning inside him like a consuming flame, he turned and led the way, stumbling and weaving, up through the trees. Around the sprawling village. Toward the stairway hewn into the steep cliff face.

Fran grabbed his arm when they reached the foot of the stairs. "No, Kim! You'll kill yourself! The radioactivity—"

Kim snorted in disgust and pointed upward to where a twisting green vine coiled around the black tower and writhed into its round opening. "That lives!" he croaked raspingly.

Fran released him and stepped back, gazing up at him, bleakly. Her hand dipped down and pulled out one of the Maxim pistols. "I'll wait," she said dully.

Kim climbed the stone stairway. He reached the round opening in the tower and stopped. The tower was constructed of some solid, black mold that was flaked and crumbling. He moved toward it, hesitantly, stepped through the round opening. The mold crunched beneath his feet.

He stood within a small, circular chamber. A round hole in the rough, flaking black ceiling led upward to another chamber. But there was no opening into the lower part of the tower—the larger part. He walked under the ceiling hole, reached up, and hauled himself through it.

Another circular chamber, with light filtering in through a jagged crack in the black wall. And another opening, leading upward. He hauled himself through it.

The last chamber was small, cramped. With crumbling, black mounds against the walls. He stared at them, dumbly.

Then he walked over and kicked at one. It collapsed in a pile of black, rotted flakes. He kicked another. It collapsed. And tiny yellow flakes spilled out with the black. Crumbling, yellow flakes and—something else. Something square, bright, silvery, that came sliding to the crusted floor.

Kim stared down at it. Then, slowly, he stooped and picked it up.

He lowered himself back down to the bottom chamber, stepped out through the round opening, and strode quickly down the stone stairway. He stopped at the bottom, turned and stared back up at the

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tall, black tower.

"What is it, Kim?" Fran asked faintly.

He held the silvery object out for her to see. . . .

THEY walked out of the Misty Mountains. They found the three abandoned cats in the valley. Fran told how the returning war party had attacked them, how they blazed their way through with flame-jelly, and how the last three cats had been cut off. They found Throwback Samson standing before a nearby tree, an expression of stunned surprise on his face. The shaft of a spear protruded from his chest, pinning him solidly to the tree.

They gathered supplies from the abandoned cats, donned filter-helmets, and went on. . . .

The Conquest of Venus.

SUMMER on Venus was the season when the rains reversed. In winter, it poured out of the clouds. In summer, it steamed out of the mud. On Venus, in summertime, it was seldom that a man could see five feet ahead of him through the dense, hot mists.

Summer passed, and the clear, autumnal season came, when the orange-red clouds blazed high above and the beautiful, terrifying landscape below stood out sharply, sparkling clear. The trail twisted down from the volcanic hill, through the blue fronds, and up onto the flat, rocky plain where the huge dome of Venusport stood gleaming.

The two *ghrakko* dogs mounted the trail with a slow, weary plodding and halted gratefully as their riders drew rein at the edge of the plain. The man and woman gazed longingly at the giant metal dome of the city, with its myriad glints of glassite ports. Neither of them spoke.

Then they prodded their mounts on up the muddy track, into the outskirts of the sprawling settlement. They rode slowly, side by side, pistols on their hips and Chavez rifles across their laps. The man was roughly bearded, lean and muscular. The woman's brown hair was tied in large rolls on her neck, compressed within her helmet. The man wore a scant loinstring and the woman a short skirt and bra, cut from the same mottled blue-gray *ghrakko* skin.

Tall, rugged plantation men and hunters stepped aside for them in the crowded, muddy street. Shop proprietors standing outside the domed prefab huts nodded their heads in silent greeting. Groups of rough, heavily armed men standing at the corners stilled their harsh, profane talk as the riders went past.

Such was the custom of the frontier, in deference to Fran, whose matching skin garments proclaimed her to be the woman of the man at her side. Such deference was her due, since a bride on the frontier is more than a mere bride, more than a married woman. She is a definite

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mother of children, a potential power of life to the community, an embodiment of sheer survival that all must respect.

And Fran was pregnant.

Kim scowled grimly as he surveyed the groups of men and women on the street. The tight gatherings on the corners, the prominence of guns among them—townspeople as well as swamp-men—were features that made him feel tense inside. His hard gaze softened momentarily as he glanced at Fran.

"Too many guns!" he commented brusquely. "Somebody's been making history!"

Fran gave a faint frown. "There's no sound of fighting!"

"Uh huh! That means the revolt is over!" Kim shook his head, uneasily. "Something else is stirring—which means conditions have changed. And they've maybe changed in a way that's bad for us!"

Fran's smile was gentle, reminiscent. "You worry too much!" she remonstrated softly.

Kim gave an unintelligible grunt and shifted the rifle across his lap, "We'd best ride on to the spaceport field," he decided. "Got to have Repair cut that steel beam off the *Voodoo's* locks and get you settled inside and—"

"Call Medical," Fran interjected musingly. "Which is why I'm doubly glad we're here, finally. And lock you up in the control pit so I won't have to worry about you going out and getting into trouble."

"Got to sell these *ghrakkos*," Kim protested matter-of-factly, "and we'd best check in with the Governor so Earth will be notified you got back safely. Then you won't need a lock to keep me on the *Voodoo*—" His voice grew husky with emotion.

Fran reached across and laid a comforting hand on his arm. "Poor man!" she murmured.

THERE were six giant Space Fleet dreadnaughts on the field, instead of two. The field was crawling with blue-uniformed troops. Kim led the way through the tangle of other spacecraft, heaving an explosive sigh of relief when he spotted the *Voodoo*, still squatting where he had left it.

An hour later, with Fran comfortably established in the little ship's stateroom and a Medical physician in attendance, Kim rode his dog and led the other back to the outskirts of town where he found a pole corral and a *ghrakko* dealer's hut. There followed another hour of haggling while he squeezed a fair price out of the shrewd dealer. Then he was strolling up to the giant airlocks and entering the vast, bustling dome of Venusport. He was one of many men of Venus, as he strode along the busy corridors, pistols on his thighs and a tanned-hide kitbag swinging at his side.

The anteroom to the Governor's office was filled with smooth-cheeked, young, blue-uniformed Fleet officers who were carrying on a mild flirtation

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with the pert, blonde receptionist at the desk. The receptionist ignored five handsome, attentive officers long enough to tell Kim that Governor Serkov was in conference and couldn't be disturbed.

"Tell him Kim Rothman is here," Kim said flatly, "and he'll be plenty disturbed!"

The blonde arched her delicate eyebrows, dubiously, but she put through the call. A voice snapped from her desk intercom screen. She looked rather startled as she faced Kim, again. "Please wait, Mr. Rothman. Commander Kruger will see you in a few minutes."

Kim nodded curtly and strolled over to a comfortable chair near the wall.

He had no sooner seated himself than a tall, thin Fleet officer came striding over, hand outstretched. "Kim!" he exclaimed joyfully.

Kim stared up at the thin, pointed, walnut-brown face. Then he was on his feet, pumping the officer's hand. "Korsak!" he blurted, his gaze running down the trim, blue uniform. "Korsak—not *you!*"

The tall Mars colonist laughed heartily. "Quite a change, isn't it?" Other Fleet officers were gathering around, grinning.

"Change!" Kim gasped. "Why, the last time I saw you, you were leading a pirate party out in space-suits to board a crippled freighter—"

"Hsst!" Korsak silenced mockingly. "Not so loud! I'm a respectable officer of the Space Fleet, now, or I might mention who was piloting that pirate craft!"

"But—" Kim eased himself cautiously back into his chair, still staring. "But how in blazes did you ever come to *this?*"

Korsak shook his head in mock sadness. "Ah, Kim, old friend, the Universe has come to a strange path! The whole Solar System is aflame with violent deeds! Revolution on Venus; then that crowd of dirty scum that moved out on the Ring. D'you know there are pirates raiding shipments to the free settlements of Mars and Venus, now, and taking their loot to the corporation holders in the Jovian System?"

Kim's eyes narrowed in recollection. "So that's it, eh? A gang tried to get me in on that deal before I left Ceresport."

"That," Korsak said emphatically, "is the deal. And they've got the worst scum in the System doing their dirty work! Take women prisoners and murder the men—"

"So you joined the Space Fleet?"

"I was—ahem—offered a commission," Korsak explained apologetically. "Seems these Space Fleet rookies never could catch anything in these big, lumbering dreadnaughts, so they've acquired the habit of commissioning us privateers in our small craft to go after the scum. They pay good, too! You ought to look into—"

"Excuse me!" The blonde receptionist was at Korsak's elbow. She spoke to Kim. "Commander Kruger will see you now. In his office."

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Kim rose and followed her to the inner doorway.

"Keep it in mind!" Korsak called after him. Kim nodded absently and strolled on.

THERE were the twin, blue-uniformed guards, the tall ivory portals that swung sedately open. And the beefy, powerful visage of Commander Kruger, behind the desk. At the side of the desk sat a girl, a secretary, with notepad and stylus.

"Sit down, Mr. Rothman," Kruger spoke cordially. "Congratulations on your return! We thought you were dead! The others arrived eight months ago and have already returned to Earth!"

"Mrs. Rothman has also returned," Kim said, stepping forward and sprawling into a chair.

"Mrs. Rothman?"

"Miss Frances Freemont," Kim explained.

Kruger nodded. "I see. All right, Mr. Rothman. I want to hear your report. Tell me everything that happened."

Kim settled back, puffed a cigarette alight, and launched into his narrative. Kruger's secretary took it down.

"—And so," Kim concluded, "Fran left the remaining seventeen cats and came back after me. She got me out of the Gep Tzong village just in time to save me from becoming a god."

"Um!" Kruger pursed his lips. thoughtfully. "So you were actually in the Gep Tzong village, hmm?"

"That's right."

"Most interesting!" Kruger rose with sudden decision. "Wait here a moment, Mr. Rothman!" He hurried out, leaving Kim and a thoroughly awed young secretary.

But it was only a moment before he came bustling back, and motioned Kim to follow him.

They went down a deep-carpeted corridor and entered another tall ivory doorway. Kim paused uncertainly as they walked into a wide, low-ceilinged chamber. There was a long conference table in the center of the room; Governor Serkov sat at the head of the table. With him were a half-dozen high-ranking Space Fleet officers.

"Mr. Rothman," said Serkov, "sit down!"

Kim walked to the foot of the table and dropped into a chair.

"You say you were in the Gep Tzong village?"

Kim nodded.

"Tell us everything you can about them!" one of the blue-uniformed officers demanded curtly. "Give us every single detail you recall!"

Kim stared at him. "Why?"

The officer's face reddened. There was a general stir of movement around the table.

"Mr. Rothman," Governor Serkov spoke gravely, "the situation has altered considerably since you were last in Venusport. Part of that alteration you must perceive was caused

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by the expedition of which you were a member—"

"No!" Kim shook his head. "I don't perceive anything. Suppose you explain it to me?"

Serkov's lips twitched impatiently. "Thanks to the efforts of that expedition to 'pacify' the Gep Tzong savages, the settlers of Venus were subjected to a severe raid in which hundreds were killed and nearly a thousand wounded!"

"I wasn't aware of that fact," Kim said soberly.

"You are now! So suppose you answer some questions?"

"Gladly."

"What sort of intelligence would you credit the Gep Tzong as having?"

"A very cunning intelligence."

"As high as ours?"

"Definitely. A bit more savage, in a very human way—"

"How well-organized are these savages?"

"Very well organized in a militant religious society. Their tribal armies are undoubtedly under religious leadership."

A Fleet officer sighed resignedly. "Savages! Fanatical barbarism! They won't be easy to whip!"

"Do you intend to whip them?" Kim asked coldly.

"No question about it!" the officer retorted. "You can make some sort of deal with savages only if those savages respect you! These Gep Tzong have raided and pillaged and [illegible] respect us for that!"

Another official cleared his throat, then added: "That's the situation in a nutshell! We'll have to march out and teach these devils a lesson. Then—and only then—will we be able to make a deal with them!"

And a third officer spoke up: "But that's savagery, itself! I can't see civilized men stoop that low—"

"Then keep your eyes closed!" the second snapped. "We're dealing with savages, and savages respect only certain things. You have to deal with 'em in their own way, or not at all!"

"And," the first chimed in, "we've got to deal with them! We need Venus. We need those mountain regions, where the atmosphere's clear and breathable—"

"But Venus belongs to *them!*" the third argued. "What right have we to come in and start pushing 'em around?"

"No right whatever!" Kim snapped suddenly. "Unfortunately, however, the pushing has already been done. I'm afraid you men are right—you'll have to give 'em a licking before they'll respect you again."

"Thank you, Mr. Rothman," Serkov spoke sarcastically. "I am sure we all appreciate hearing you admit your expedition was the cause of this!"

"I think what Mr. Rothman refers to," countered the second officer, "is the merciless way Venus settlers [illegible] the Gep Tzong as

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though they were beasts. I understand that was your personal opinion of them, too, Governor Serkov!"

Serkov's face turned gray. He opened his mouth to speak, but the first officer beat him to it.

"The fact remains," this erstwhile, silver-haired man said, "that Venus is not and never was an open planet just ripe for human settlement. What's happened has happened—we can't change it now—and we were all at least partly to blame for it!"

"Oh, were we!" Serkov snorted disdainfully. "And what about these fools who were after that so-called 'sacred metal' of the Gep Tzong—"

"It's still there," Kim interrupted quietly.

"What?"

"And it could still be made lethally radioactive, I suppose, if you had the mechanisms necessary to handle it," he added. Slowly, he rose to his feet and faced them down the long table. "Gentlemen, your debate has been most interesting. However, there are a few things I would like to add—

"First, the Gep Tzong are not some species of wild animal. The settlers of Venus know that, now. They've learned it the hard way. And they are going to learn, further, that the Gep Tzong is no mere form of savagely intelligent monster they can do away with easily, without qualms! *The Gep Tzong are not alien!*

"You've pictured the Gep Tzong as some life-form of relatively low intelligence which has evolved on Venus but hasn't been capable of building itself any recognizable form of civilization above the lowest stage of barbarism. In a way, you may be right; but as facts go, gentlemen, you're wrong!

"The Gep Tzong have a legend which claims they're descendants of gods who came down from the mountain-tops. These gods built a black temple and gave birth to the first generation of Gep Tzong. The temple is there; I've been inside it. But shortly after the first generation was born—the Adams and Eves of the Gep Tzong—their gods died, all but one.

"Maybe those gods died from radioactive burns, but I doubt it—burns also kill sperms! More likely, they died because they fell down in the Misty Mountains and weren't innoculated against the diseases of Venus! And the sole survivor who became the teacher of the first Gep Tzong generation was unable to talk. He was a mute! And that's not an uncommon result of severe shock!

"No, gentlemen, you're dead wrong about the Gep Tzong. They're different, yes—they're gray and toadlike. Maybe that's the effect of the Venusian atmosphere. Maybe it didn't come with one generation, but developed gradually through a hundred and seventy years of inbreeding. I don't know. My—my wife doesn't know—

"But the Gep Tzong are not alien.

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And furthermore, *I can prove it!*"

He jerked the kitbag from his side and tugged at its thongs. It came open and his hand dipped inside. "I found this in their temple," he finished gravely. "It is the true account of the gods of the Gep Tzong—"

With that, he pulled his hand out and tossed the square, silvery object on the table before them. It clattered loudly on the glossy surface.

They sat staring at it, speechlessly. At the heavy permalloy cover, the thin permalloy sheets. Made to last for aeons, to withstand the worst of conditions.

Across its stained, warped silver face was the deeply etched inscription:

LOG OF THE
S.S. STARLING III

Tall ivory portals swung silently open. The blonde receptionist appeared, stared uncertainly at the stiff statues around the table, then beckoned to Kim. "Audiovisor call for you, Mr. Rothman! From the spaceport field!" She turned and hurried over to a wall screen. "You can take it here!"

Kim strode over to the screen, quickly. The girl tuned the studs expertly, then stepped aside.

Fran's round, full face gazed out at him. Her eyelids drooped sleepily. "Kim—" she murmured softly. "Kim! They say—it's almost time—" Then, abruptly, the screen went blank.

Kim whirled and marched to the doorway. He paused there, between the tall ivory portals, and looked back at the men seated around the table.

"Gentlemen," he said gruffly, "I leave you an open planet. Good luck to you."

Then, he was gone.

THE END

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A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR

By Fredric Brown

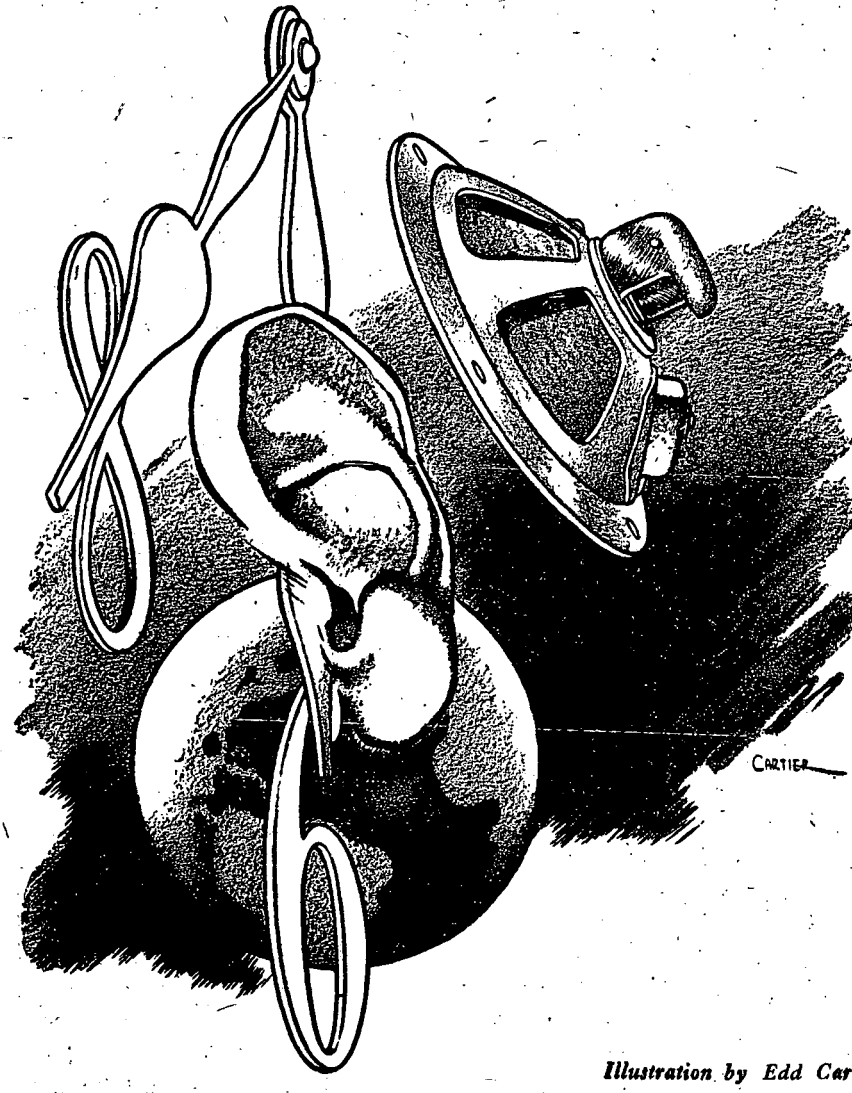

Illustration by Edd Carter

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AT 8:30 P.M. everywhere on Earth radio programs paused briefly for "a word from our sponsor"—and that one word threw the whole world into a state of turmoil the like of which had never been seen before.

LOOKING at it one way, you could say that it happened a great many different times over a twenty-four hour period; another way, that it happened once and all at once.

It happened, that is, at 8:30 P. M. on Wednesday, June 9th, 1954. That means it came first, of course, in the Marshall Islands, the Gilbert Islands and in all the other islands—and on all the ships at sea—which were just west of the International Date Line. It was twenty-four hours later in happening in the various islands and on the various ships just east of the International Date Line.

Of course, on ships which, during that twenty-four hour period, crossed the date line from east to west and therefore had two 8:30 P. M.'s, both on June 9th, it happened twice. On ships crossing the other way and therefore having *no* 8:30 P. M. (or one bell, if we must be nautical) it didn't happen at all.

That may sound complicated, but it's simple, really. Just say that it happened at 8:30 P. M. everywhere, regardless of time belts and strictly in accordance with whether or not the area in question had or did not have daylight saving time. Simply that: 8:30 P. M. *everywhere.*

And 8:30 P. M. everywhere is just about the optimum moment for radio listening, which undoubtedly had something to do with it. Otherwise somebody or something went to an awful lot of unnecessary trouble, so to stagger the times that they would be the same all over the world.

Even if, at 8:30 on June 9, 1954, you weren't listening to your radio — and you probably were — you certainly remember it. The world was on the brink of war. Oh, it had been on the brink of war for years, but this time its toes were over the edge and it balanced precariously. There were special sessions in—but we'll come to that later.

TAKE Dan Murphy, inebriated Australian of Irish birth, being pugnacious in a Brisbane pub. And the Dutchman known as Dutch being pugnacious right back. The radio blaring. The bartender trying to quiet them down and the rest of the crowd trying to egg them on. You've seen it happen and you've heard it happen, unless you make a habit of staying out of waterfront saloons.

Murphy had stepped back from

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the bar already and was wiping his hands on the sides of his dirty sweat shirt. He was well into the preliminaries. He said, "Why, you ——— ——— ——— — ———!" and waited for the riposte. He wasn't disappointed. "——— you!" said Dutch.

That, as it happened, was at twenty-nine minutes and twenty-eight seconds past eight o'clock, June 9, 1954. Dan Murphy took a second or two to smile happily and get his dukes up. Then something happened to the radio. For a fraction of a second, only that long, it went dead. Then a quite calm, quite ordinary voice said, "And now a word from our sponsor." And there was something — some ineffably indefinable quality— in the voice that made everybody in the room listen and hear. Dan Murphy with his right pulled back for a roundhouse swing; Dutch the Dutchman with his feet ready to step back from it and his forearm ready to block it; the bartender with his hand on the bung starter under the bar and his knees bent ready to vault over the bar.

A full frozen second, and then a different voice, also from the radio, said "Fight."

One word, only one word. Probably the only time in history that "*a* word from our sponsor" on the radio had been just that. And I won't try to describe the inflection of that word; it has been too variously described. You'll find people who swear it was said viciously, in hatred; others who are equally sure that it was calm and cold. But it was unmistakably a *command,* in whatever tone of voice.

And then there was a fraction of a second of silence again and then the regular program—in the case of the radio in the Brisbane pub, an Hawaiian instrumental group—was back on.

Dan Murphy took another step backwards and said, "Wait a minute. What the hell was that?"

Dutch the Dutchman had already lowered his big fists and was turning to the radio. Everybody else in the place was staring at it already. The bartender had taken his hand off the bung-starter. He said, "——— me for a — ———. What was *that* an ad for?"

"Let's call this off a minute, Dutch," Dan Murphy said. "I got a funny feeling like that ——— —— radio was talking to *me.* Personally. And what the ——— — ——— —— business has a bloody wireless set got telling *me* what to do?"

"Me too," Dutch said, sincerely if a bit ambiguously. He put his elbows on the bar and stared at the radio. Nothing but the plaintive sliding wail of an Hawaiian ensemble came out of it.

Dan Murphy stepped to the bar beside him. He said, "What the devil were we fighting about?"

"You called me a ——— ———," Dutch reminded

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him. "And I said, —— you.'"

"Oh," Murphy said. "All right, in a couple minutes I'll knock your head off. But right now I want to think a bit. How's about a drink?"

"Sure," Dutch said.

For some reason, they never got around to starting the fight.

TAKE, two and a half hours later (but still at 8:30 P.M.), the conversation of Mr. and Mrs. Wade Evans of Oklahoma City, presently in their room at the Grand Hotel, Singapore, dressing to go nightclubbing in what they thought was the most romantic city of their round-the-world cruise. The room radio going, but quite softly (Mrs. Evans had turned it down so her husband wouldn't miss a word of what she had to say to him, which was *plenty*.)

"*And* the way you acted yesterday evening on the boat with that Miss—Mam*selle* Cartier — Cah-tee-*yay*. Half your age, and *French*. Honestly, Wade, I don't see why you took *me* along at all on this cruise. Second honeymoon, indeed!"

"And just *how* did I act with her? I danced with her, twice. Twice in a whole evening. Dammit, Ida, I'm getting sick of your acting this way. And beside—" Mr. Evans took a deep breath to go on, and thereby lost his chance.

"Treat me like dirt. When we get back—"

"All right, *all right*. If that's the way you feel about it, why wait till we get back? If you think *I'm* enjoying—"

Somehow that silence of only a fraction of a second on the radio stopped him. "And now a word from our sponsor . . . "

And half a minute later, with the radio again playing Strauss, Wade Evans was still staring at it in utter bewilderment. Finally he said, "What was *that?*"

Ida Evans looked at him wide-eyed. "You know, I had the funniest feeling that that was talking to us, to *me*? Like it was telling us to g-go ahead and fight, like we were starting to."

Mr. Evans laughed a little uncertainly. "Me, too. Like it *told* us to. And the funny thing is, now I don't want to." He walked over and turned the radio off. "Listen, Ida, do we *have* to fight? After all, this *is* our second honeymoon. Why not—listen, Ida, do you really want to go night-clubbing this evening?"

"Well—I do want to see Singapore, a little, and this is our only night here, but—it's early; we don't have to go out right away.

I DON'T mean of course, that everybody who heard that radio announcement was fighting, physically or verbally, or even thinking about fighting. And of course there were a couple of billion people who didn't hear it at all because they either didn't have

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radio sets or didn't happen to have them turned on. But almost everybody heard *about* it. Maybe not all of the African pygmies or all of the Australian bushmen, no, but every intelligent person in a civilized or semi-civilized country heard of it sooner or later and generally sooner.

And the point is, if there is a point, that those who *were* fighting or thinking of fighting and who happened to be within hearing distance of a turned-on radio . . .

EIGHT-thirty o'clock continued its way around the world. Mostly in jumps of an even hour from time-zone to time zone, but not always; some time zones vary from that system—as Singapore, on the half hour; as Calcutta, seven minutes short of the hour. But by regular or irregular intervals, the phenomenon of the word continued its way from east to west, happening everywhere at eight-thirty o'clock precisely.

Delhi, Teheran, Baghdad, Moscow. The Iron Curtain, in 1954, was stronger, more impenetrable than it had ever been before, so nothing was known at the time of the effect of the broadcast there; later it was learned that the course of events there was quite similar to the course of events in Washington, D. C., Berlin, Paris, London . . .

WASHINGTON. The President was in special conference with several members of the cabinet and the majority and minority leaders of the Senate. The Secretary of Defense was speaking, very quietly: "Gentlemen, I say again that our best, perhaps our only, chance of winning is to get there first. If we don't, they will. Everything shows that. Those confidential reports of yours, Mr. President, are absolute proof that they intend to attack. We *must*—"

A discreet tap on the door caused him to stop in midsentence.

The president said, "That's Walter—about the broadcast," and then louder, "Come in."

The president's confidential secretary came in. "Everything is ready, Mr. President," he said. "You said you wished to hear it yourself. These other gentlemen—?"

The President nodded, "We'll all go," he said. He stood, and then the others. "How many sets, Walter?"

"Six. We've tuned them to six different stations; two in this time belt, Washington and New York; two in other parts of this country, Denver and San Francisco; two foreign stations, Paris and Tokyo."

"Excellent," said the President. "Shall we go and hear this mysterious broadcast that all Europe and Asia are excited about?"

The Secretary of Defense smiled. "If you wish. But I doubt we'll hear anything. Getting control of the stations here—" He shrugged

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Walter, said the President, "has there been anything further from Europe or Asia?"

"Nothing new, sir. Nothing has happened there since eight-thirty, their time. But confirmations of what did happen then are increasing. Everybody who was listening to any station at eight-thirty heard it. Wether the station was in their time zone or not. For instance, a radio set in London which happened to be tuned to Athens, Greece, got the broadcast at eight-thirty, London—that is, Greenwich—time. Local sets in Athens tuned to the same station had heard it at eight-thirty Athens time—two hours earlier."

The majority leader of the Senate frowned. "That is patently impossible. It would indicate—"

"Exactly," said the President drily. "Gentlemen, shall we adjourn to the room where the receiving sets have been placed? It lacks five minutes of—eight-thirty."

They went down the hall to a room hideous with the sound of six receiving sets tuned to six different programs. Three minutes, two minutes, one—

Sudden silence for a fraction of a second. From six sets simultaneously the impersonal voice, "And now a word from our sponsor." The commanding voice gave the one-word command.

Then, again, the six radio sets blared forth their six different programs. No one tried to speak over that sound. They filed back into the conference chamber.

The President looked at the Secretary of Defense. "Well, Rawlins?"

The Secretary's face was white. "The only thing I can think of that would account for it—" He paused until the President prodded him with another "Well?"

"I'll grant it sounds incredible, but—a space-ship? Cruising around the world at the even rate of its period of revolution — a little over a thousand miles an hour. Over each point which it passes—which would be at the same hour everywhere—it momentarily blanks out other stations and puts on its own broadcast."

The Senate's majority leader snorted. "Why a space ship? There are planes that can travel that fast."

"Ever hear of radar? With our new installations along the coast anything going over up to a hundred miles high would show. And do you think Europe hasn't radar too?"

"And would they *tell* us if they spotted something?"

"England would. France would. And how about all our ships at sea that the thing has already passed over?"

"But a *space* ship!"

The President held up his hand. "Gentlemen. Let's not argue until we have the facts. Reports from many sources are even now coming

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in and being sifted and evaluated. We've been getting ready for this for over fifteen hours now and—I'll see what's known already,' if you'll pardon me."

He picked up the telephone at his end of the long conference table, spoke into it briefly and then listened for about two minutes before he said, "Thank you," and replaced the receiver.

Then he looked straight down the middle of the conference table as he spoke. "No radar station noticed anything out of the ordinary, not even a faint or blurred image." He hesitated. "The broadcast, gentlemen, was heard uniformly in all areas of the Eastern Time Zone which have daylight saving. It was uniformly *not* heard in areas which do not have daylight saving, where it is now seven-thirty P. M."

"Impossible," said the Secretary of Defense.

The President nodded slowly. "Exactly. Yet certain reports from borders of time zones in Europe led us to anticipate it, and it was checked carefully. Radio receivers were placed, in pairs, along the borders of certain zones. For example, a pair of receivers were placed at the city limits of Baltimore, one twelve inches within the city limits, the other twelve inches outside. Two feet apart. They were identical sets, identically tuned to the same station, operated from the same power source. One set received 'a word from our sponsor'; the other did not. The set-up is being maintained for another hour. But I do not doubt that—" He glanced at his wrist watch. "—forty-five minutes from now, when it will be eight-thirty o'clock in the non-daylight-saving zones, the situation will be reversed; the broadcast will be received by the set outside the daylight saving zone border and not by the similarly tuned set just inside."

He glanced around the table and his face was set and white. "Gentlemen, what is happening tonight all over the world is beyond science—our science, at any rate."

"It can't be," said the Secretary of Labor. "Damn it, Mr. President, there's got to be an explanation."

"Further experiments—much more delicate and decisive ones— are being arranged, especially for the non-daylight-saving areas of the Pacific Time Zone, where we still have four hours to arrange them. And the top scientists of California will be on the job." The President took out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "Until we have their reports and analyses, early tomorrow morning, shall we adjourn, gentlemen?"

The Defense Secretary frowned. "But, Mr. President, the purpose of our conference tonight was *not* to discuss this mysterious broadcast. Can we not get back to the original issue?"

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"Do you really think that any major step should even be contemplated before we know what happened tonight—is happening tonight, I should say?"

"If we *don't* start the war, Mr. President, need I point out again who *will*? And the tremendous—practically decisive — advantage of taking the first step, gaining the offensive?"

"And obey the order in the boadcast?" growled the Secretary of Labor.

"Why not? Weren't we going to do just that anyway, because we had to?"

"Mr. Secretary," the President said slowly. "That order was not addressed to us specifically. That broadcast was heard—is being heard—all over the world, in all languages. But even if it was heard only here, and only in our own language, I would certainly hesitate to obey a command until I knew from whom that command came. Gentlemen, do you fully realize the implications of the fact that our top scientists, thus far at any rate, could not conceivably duplicate the conditions of that broadcast? That means either one of two things; that whoever produced the phenomenon is possessed of a science beyond ours, or that the phenomenon is of supernatural origin."

The Secretary of Commerce said softly, "My God."

The President looked at him.

"Not unless your god is either Mars or Satan, Mr. Weatherby."

THE hour of 8:30 P. M. had, several hours before, reached and passed the International Date Line. It was still 8:30 P. M. somewhere but not of June 9th, 1954. The mysterious broadcast was over.

It was dawn in Washington, D. C. The President, in his private office, was still interviewing, one after another, the long succession of experts who had been summoned — and brought by fast planes — to Washington for the purpose.

His face was haggard with weariness, his voice a trifle hoarse.

"Mr. Adams," he said to the current visitor, "you are, I am given to understand, the top expert on electronics—particularly as applied to radio—in this country. Can you offer any conceivable physical explanation of the method used by X?"

"X?"

"I should have explained; we are now using that designation for convenience to indicate the—uh—originator of the broadcast, whether singular or plural, human, extra-terrestial, or supernatural — either diabolical or divine."

"I see. Mr. President, it could not have been done with *our* knowledge of science. That is all I can say."

"And your conclusion?"

"I have none."

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"Your *guess*, then."

The visitor hesitated. "My guess, Mr. President, outrageous as it seems, is that somewhere on Earth exists a cabal of scientists of whom we do not know, who have operated in secret and carried electronics a step — or several steps — beyond what is generally known."

"And their purpose?"

"I would say, again a guess, their purpose is to throw the world into war to enable them to take over and rule the world. Indubitably they had other—and more deadly—devices for later use, after a war has weakened us."

"Then you do not believe war would be advisable?"

"My God, no, Mr. President!"

"MR. Everett," said the President. "Your theory of a cabal of scientists corresponds with one I heard only a few minutes ago from a colleague of yours. Except for one thing. He believes that their purpose is evil—to precipitate war so they can take over. You believe, if I understand you correctly, that their purpose is benevolent."

"Exactly, sir. For one thing, if they're that good in electronics, they're probably that good in other fields. They wouldn't *need* to precipitate a war in order to take over. I think they are operating secretly to prevent war, to give mankind a chance to advance. But they know enough of human nature to know that men are pretty apt to do the opposite of what they are told. But that's psychology, which is not my field. I understand you are also interviewing some psychologists?"

"Yes," said the President, wearily.

"THEN, if I understand you correctly, Mr. Corby," said the President, "you believe that the command to fight was designed to produce the opposite effect, whoever gave it?"

"Certainly, sir. But I must admit that all of my colleagues do not completely agree with me. They make exceptions."

"Will you explain the exceptions?"

"The major one is the possibility that the broadcast was of extra-terrestrial origin. An extra-terrestrial might or might not know enough of human psychology to realize that the command in question is likely—if not certain—to have the opposite effect. A lesser possibility is that—if a group of Earth scientists, operating secretly, produced the broadcasts, they might have concentrated on the physical sciences as against the mental, and be ignorant of psychology to the extent that—well, they would defeat their purpose."

"Their purpose being to start war?"

"Not my opinion, Mr. President. Only a possibility taken into con-

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sideration. I think they are trying to *prevent* war."

"In which case the command was psychologically sound?"

"Yes. And that is *not* opinion solely. Mr. President, people have been awake all night organizing peace societies, not only here, but all over the world."

"*All* over?"

"Well—we don't know, of course, what is going on behind the Iron Curtain. And circumstances are different there. But in my opinion, a movement for peace will have arisen there, too, although it may not have been able to organize, as elsewhere."

"Suppose, Mr. Corby, your idea of a group of benevolent scientists —or ones who think they are benevolent scientists — are back of it. What then?"

"*What then?* We'd damn well *better* not start a war—or anybody else either. If they're that good in electronics, they've got other stuff. They'll like as not utterly destroy whatever country makes an aggressive move first!"

"And if their purpose is malevolent?"

"Are you joking, Mr. President? We'd be playing right into their hands to start a war. We wouldn't last ten days."

"MR. Lykov, you are recommended to me as the top expert on the psychology of the Russian people under Communism. The most famous minister in the What is your opinion as to how they will react to what happened last night?"

"They're going to think it's a Capitalist plot. They're going to think *we* did it."

"What purpose could they conceivably think we had?"

"To trap them into starting a war. Of course they intended to start one anyway—it's just been a question of which of us started it first, now that, since their development of atomics, they've had time to stock-pile—but they probably think right now that for some reason we *want* them to make the first move. So they won't; at least not until they've waited a while."

"GENERAL Wilkinson," said the President, "I know it is early for you to have received many reports as yet from our espionage agents in Europe and Asia, but the few that you have received —indicate what?"

"That they're doing just what *we're* doing, sir. Sitting tight and wondering. There have been no troop movements, either toward borders or away from them."

"Thank you, General."

"DR. Burke," said the President, "I have been informed that the Council of United Churches has been in session all night. From the fact that you look as tired as I feel, I judge that is correct."

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United States nodded, smiling faintly.

"And is it your opinion—I mean the opinion of your council—that last night's occurrence was of supernatural origin?"

"Almost unanimously, Mr. President."

"Then let's ignore the minority opinion of your group and concentrate on what you almost unanimously believe. Is it that the—we may as well call it *miracle*, since we are discussing it on the assumption that it was of supernatural origin—was of divine or diabolical origin? More simply, was it God or the devil?"

"There, Mr. President, we have an almost even split of opinion. Approximately half of us believe that Satan accomplished it somehow. The other half that God did. Shall I outline briefly the arguments of either faction?"

"Please."

"The Satan group. The fact that the command was an evil one. Against the argument that God is sufficiently more powerful than Satan to have prevented the manifestation, the Satan group countered quite legitimately that God—in his infinite wisdom—may have permitted it, knowing the effect is likely to be the reverse of what Satan intended."

"I see, Dr. Burke."

"And the opposing group. The fact that, because of the perversity of human nature, the ultimate effect of the command is going to be good rather than stupid. Against the Satan group's argument that God could not issue an evil command, even for a laudable purpose, the counter-argument that man cannot understand God sufficiently to place any limitation whatever upon what He can or cannot, would or would not, do."

The President nodded. "And does either group advocate *obeying* the command?"

"Definitely not. To those who believe the command came from Satan, disobedience is automatic. Those who believe the command came from God aver that those who believe in Him are sufficiently intelligent and good to recognize the command as divine irony."

"And the Satan group, Doctor—do they believe the devil is not smart enough to know that his command may backfire?"

"Evil is always stupid, Mr. President."

"And your personal opinion, Dr. Burke? You have not said to which faction you belong."

The minister smiled. "I am one of the very small faction which does not accept that the phenomenon was of supernatural origin at all, either from God *or* the devil."

"Then whom do you believe X to be, Doctor?"

"My personal guess is that X is extra-terrestrial. Perhaps as near as Mars, perhaps as far as another Galaxy."

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THE President sighed and said, "No, Walter, I simply cannot take time out for lunch. If you'll bring me a sandwich here, I'll have to apologize to my next visitor or two for eating while I talk. And coffee, lots of coffee."

"Certainly, sir."

"Just a minute, Walter. The telegrams that have been coming in since eight-thirty last night—how many are there now?"

"Well over forty thousand, sir. We've been working at classifying them, but we're several thousand behind."

"And?"

The presidential secretary said, "From every class—ministers, truck drivers, crackpots, business leaders, everybody. Offering every theory possible—but pretty much only one conclusion. No matter who they think instigated that broadcast or why, they want to disobey its command. Yesterday, I would say that nine-tenths of our population was resigned to war; well over half thought we ought to start it first. Today—well, there's always a lunatic fringe; about one telegram out of four hundred thinks we should go to war. The others—well, I think that today a declaration of war would cause a revolution, Mr. President."

"Thank you, Walter."

The secretary turned at the doorway. "A report from the army recruiting corps — enlistments thus far today have been fifteen— throughout the entire country. An average day for the past month, up to noon, was about eight thousand. I'll send in your sandwich, sir."

"PROFESSOR Winslow, I hope you will pardon my eating this sandwich while we talk. You are, I am told, professor of semantics at New York University, and the top man in your field?"

Professor Winslow smiled deprecatingly. "You would hardly expect me to agree to that, Mr. President. I presume you wish to ask questions about last night's—uh—broadcast?"

"Exactly. What are your conclusions?"

"The word 'fight' is hardly analyzable. Whether it was meant in fact or in reverse is a matter for the psychologists—and even they are having grave difficulty with it, until and unless they learn who gave that command."

The President nodded.

"But, Mr. President, the rest of the broadcast, the phrase in another voice that preceded the command. 'And now a word from our sponsor'—that is something which should give us something to work on, especially as we have studied it carefully in many languages, and worked out fully the connotation of every word."

"Your conclusion?"

"Only this; that it was carefully worded, designed, to conceal the identity of the broadcaster or broad-

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casters. Quite successfully. We can draw no worth while conclusions."

"DR. Abrams, has any correlating phenomenon been noticed at your or any other observatory?"

"Nothing, Mr. President." The little man with the gray goatee smiled quietly. "The stars are all in their courses. Nothing observable is amiss with the universe. I fear I can give you no help—except my personal opinion."

"Which is?"

"That—regardless of the meaning, pro or con, of the command to fight — the opening phrase meant exactly what it said. That we are *sponsored.*"

"By whom? God?"

"I am an agnostic, Mr. President. But I do not rule out the possibility that man isn't the highest *natural* being in the universe. It's quite large, you know. Perhaps we're an experiment conducted by someone—in another dimension, anywhere. Perhaps, generally speaking, we're allowed to go our way for the sake of the experiment. But we almost went too far, this time, toward destroying ourselves and ending the experiment. And he didn't want it ended. So—" He smiled gently. "—a word from our sponsor."

The President leaned forward across the desk, almost spilling his coffee. "But, if that is true, was the word *meant?*"

"I think that whether it was meant—in the sense in which you mean the word 'meant'—is irrelevant. If we have a sponsor, he must know what its effect will be, and that effect—whether it be war or peace—is what he wanted to achieve."

The President wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"How do you differentiate this—sponsor from the being most people call God?"

The little man hesitated. "I'm not sure I do. I told you I was an agnostic, not an atheist. However, I do not believe He sits on a cloud and has a long white beard."

"MR. Baylor, I particularly wish to thank you for coming here. I am fully aware that you, as head of the Communist Party in the United States, are against everything I stand for. Yet I wish to ask you what the opinion of the Communists here is of the broadcast of yesterday evening."

"There is no matter of opinion. We *know* what it is."

"Of your own knowledge, Mr. Baylor, or because Moscow has spoken?"

"That is irrelevant. We are perfectly aware that the Capitalistic countries instigated that broadcast. And solely for the purpose of inciting *us* to start the war."

"And for what reason would we do that?"

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Because you have something new. Something in electronics that enabled you to accomplish what you accomplished last night and that is undoubtedly a decisive weapon. However, because of the opinion of the rest of the world, you do not dare to use it if you yourselves — as your warmongers have been demanding, as indeed you have been planning to do— start the war. You want us to start it and then, with world opinion on your side, you would be able to use your new weapon. However, we refuse to be propagandized."

"Thank you, Mr. Baylor. And may I ask you one question strictly off the record? Will you answer in the first person singular, not plural, your own personal, private opinion?"

"You may."

"Do you, personally, *really* believe we instigated that broadcast?"

"I—I do not know."

"THE afternoon mail, Walter?"

"Well over a hundred thousand letters, Mr. President. We have been able to do only random sampling. They seem to be about the same as the telegrams. General Wickersham is anxious to see you, sir. He thinks you should issue a proclamation to the army. Army morale is in a terrible state, he says, and he thinks a word from you—"

The President smiled grimly. "*What* word, Walter? The only single word of importance I can think of has already been given—and hasn't done army morale any good at all. Tell General Wickersham to wait; maybe I'll be able to see him within a few days. Who's next on the list?"

"Professor Gresham of Harvard."

"His specialty?"

"Philosophy and metaphysics."

The President sighed. "Send him in."

"YOU actually mean, Professor, that you have no opinions at all? You won't even guess whether X is God, devil, extra-galactic superman, terrestrial scientist, Martian—?"

"What good would a guess do, Mr. President? I am certain of only one thing—and that is that *we will never know who or what X is*. Mortal or immortal, terrestrial or extra-galactic, microcosmic or macrocosmic, four dimensional or twelve, he is sufficiently more clever than we to keep us from discovering his identity. And it is obviously necessary to his plan that we do not know."

"Why?"

"It is obvious that he wants us to disobey that command, isn't it? And who ever heard of men obeying a command unless they knew—or thought they knew—*who gave it?* If anybody ever learns who gave that command, he can decide whether to obey it or not. *As long as he doesn't know, it's psychologically almost impossible for him to*

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obey it."

The President nodded slowly. "I see what you mean. Men either obey or disobey commands—even commands they think come from God—according to their own will. But how *can* they obey an order, and still be men, when they don't know for sure where the order came from?"

He laughed. "And even the Commies don't know for sure whether we Capitalists did it or not. And as long as they're not sure—"

"Did we?"

The President said, "I'm beginning to wonder. Even though I know we didn't, it doesn't seem more unlikely than anything else." He tilted back in his chair and stared at the ceiling. After a while he said softly, "Anyway, I don't think there's going to be a war. Either side would be mad to start it."

There wasn't a war.

THE END

Science Fiction Book Reviews

A series of hard-cover one dollar reprints have made their welcome appearance in the science fiction world, published by Grosset & Dunlap, New York, and edited by well-known anthologist Groff Conklin.

FURY by Henry Kuttner. This novel is taken directly from the pages of *Astounding Science Fiction*, where it was published in 1947 under the pen name of Lawrence O'Donnell, and has never before appeared in book form. *Fury* is the tale of a handful of immortals dwelling in the undersea Keeps on Venus who must defend themselves from a one-man rebellion staged by a rough-and-ready character who believes himself to be an ordinary mortal, and who also believes the immortals have no especial right to rule. That much, at least, is the surface plot; there is a second and hidden one.

THE WORLD OF NULL-A by A. E. van Vogt. Again from the same magazine, circa 1945. *Null-A* by this time should be known in every English-speaking country on the globe, and just as widely misunderstood. It is certainly no book for the newcomer to science fiction to tackle, for it is van Vogt riding his pet theme: telepathy, immortality, and tangled plot. No simple review is possible because of the many webs spun to construct the whole, but briefly it concerns a super-hero pitting himself against the dictatorial world-rulers, a hero who bobs up in a new body each time he is killed. This supply of bodies can't last forever and because he does not know how many there are, he plays the cautious side.

THE HUMANOIDS by Jack Williamson. This is the final selection from the same magazine, originally published in 1948. *Humanoids* suffers in that employs some of the same ingredients: telepathy, fighting the would-be masters, the outer reaches of space, but it is not similar in any other respect.

The theme here is simple, shall we or shall we not live under the rule

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of the robots? They offer a paradise on earth, no work, no war, no danger. But freedom is lost in that absence of all danger means the little things like absence of razors for shaving, cars for driving, golf clubs for swinging. A well-thinking man built the humanoids to save mankind from itself, turning them off was something else again.

THE ISLAND OF CAPTAIN SPARROW by S. Fowler Wright.

The one oldie in the lot, included for no apparent reason. This is more of a fantasy-adventure than science fiction and is the story of the castaway on a lonely Pacific Island - - - the difference being that this island also holds the descendants of a pirate crew, satyrs, and a not-so-different pretty girl.

Conklin has turned out four books well worth the price.

Bob Tucker

Some die-hards are going to insist that Judith Merril's SHADOW ON THE HEARTH (*Doubleday, New York*, 1950. 277 p. $3.00) is not science fiction—the publisher doesn't label it so—but "ordinary" fiction.

What makes this gook outstanding is the fact that it illustrates the great strides which science fiction has taken toward real literary and human maturity. SHADOW ON THE HEARTH, in a sense, represents the trend of mature modern fiction toward science fiction themes, as was the case with Orwell's NINETEEN EIGHTY - FOUR and Stewart's EARTH ABIDES.

This book will do science fiction as literature much good, for it is a completely believable, warm, human novel about the people across the street and the problems they—and we—will face and solve out of our own strengths and weaknesses when the first atomic bombs of the last war fall on our cities tomorrow or the day after. Gladys Mitchell makes a home on the fringes of New York City for her engineer husband, Jon, their daughters Barbie, 15, and Ginny, going-on-six, and an older son, Tom, with the army in Texas. When the bombs fall on New York, Jon is somewhere in the city; the two girls are in school; Gladys is at home. The book follows them through their next few days, as the grisly shadow of radiation sickness hovers over the children and our society tries to hold itself together around them.

Judith Merril had every opportunity to turn drama into melodrama—into soap-opera hokum—by laying on lavishly with terrific scenes of destruction and famine, looting and rape, murder and lynch-law, wth the bloody bitterness of Hiroshima and Nagasaki heaped back on our heads a hundred-fold. All the elements are there. The fugitive teacher, Garson Levy, might have been hunted down as a spy and dragged away. Jim Turner, the officious neighbor on the make, might have become a typical "heavy." The maid, Veda, might actually have been an enemy agent. One or both of the girls might have sloughed away with radiation plague, with every detail drawn out with gruesome relish.

But none of these things happen. The intolerable suspense of SHADOW ON THE HEARTH is suspense of character—of a woman too level-headed to become hysterical, yet too numbed and unbelieving to understand quite clearly what she must do, knowing vaguely all the time that her hesitation, her fumbling, her unwillingness to face reality may be sapping the chances for life of her child. The book's strength, too, is not in sweeping spectacles of holocaust and passion, but in Gladys Mitchell's personality, in fifteen-year-old Barbie's, in Gar Levy and Dr. Pete Spinelli.

I should like to see directors and artists of the caliber who can make "No Sad Songs for Me," or "The Men" turn SHADOW ON THE HEARTH into as memorable a film as it is a book. It could be done!

P. Schuyler Miller

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AMERICA'S SECRET WEAPON?

By Willy Ley

Science-fiction readers never hesitate to point out that many of Yesterday's "impossible gadgets" are very real today. In the following article Willy Ley makes a few "predictions" that may well be Tomorrow's facts!

Technological prophecy is a ticklish business at its best. No matter how well the "prophet" knows his own field, there is always the possibility that a development in another field can cross him up.

For example: the man or men who during the second world war conceived and developed the German flying bomb V-1 and who later managed to have it put into production and operation were no doubt competent prophets in their own field, with all logic apparently firmly on their side.

Here they had a weapon with a hundred-mile range. It was not accurate, but cheap enough that volume of use could easily make up for lack of accuracy. Their flying bomb, they knew, could easily be downed by a first class fighter plane. But fighter planes, even if not first class, cost money and it takes more money and much time to train competent pilots. If for no other reason than the cash outlay involved there could be more V-1's than fighter planes in the air at any one time so that many, if not most, of the V-1's would get through to their target. And the V-1's were not influenced by the weather, they could operate in rain, sleet and fog; the defending fighter planes were at least handicapped by such weather. Within the range of the flying bomb they constituted an all-weather air force versus a weather-sensitive air force. It seemed—oh, not even a prophecy at all, but a perfectly logical conclusion—that the flying bomb would at least win a major battle, if not a war.

But the logical conclusion collapsed. There had been the unspoken assumption that the Allies would not land on the European mainland and capture the launching sites. But the Allies did. And there had been the other unspoken assumption that the only worthwhile opponent of the flying bomb would be the fighter plane and that anti-aircraft artillery would be relatively ineffective. But meanwhile the M-9 gun director had been quietly developed and tested in America and with its guidance the anti-aircraft batteries shot the flying bombs down in droves.

Or, to name one more example,

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it had been simple to prophesy in, say, 1930, that useful war rockets could not be developed *unless* smokeless double-base powders could be adapted for the purpose. If you assumed that smokeless powders could be adapted (as was actually the case) you could feel justified in predicting all kinds of portable rocket weapons which would provide the infantry with the fire power of the old field artillery. The bazooka, one could say at a later date, was just the first step. Yes—but then the recoilless rifles came along and took over most of the functions which had been mentally reserved for portable rocket launchers.

In short, an unforeseen development can ruin any prediction, from a newspaperman's private opinion of how things ought to develop to the carefully considered plans of a general staff. But at the present moment it certainly looks as if submarines will be a very important weapon in a future conflict. Things look that way for quite a number of reasons. One of them is the nature of news releases.

In March 1951 the U. S. Navy launched the K-1 at Groton, Connecticut. The K-1, or Type "Killer" is something entirely new on and under the seas, it is a submarine designed for the sole purpose of destroying other submarines. As modern submarines go, it is small, its displacement is 750 tons and it carries an enlisted crew of 35 men, both these figures are precisely half of the corresponding figures for the fleet type submarine. The K-1 carries 4 officers, the fleet type submarine seven. The K-1 is 195 feet long, the fleet type submarine 311 feet. Naturally not a word has been said about the K-1's equipment, except that the sub itself is more maneuverable than the fleet type and that it has a very low noise level.

But the moral is clear: if we develop a special "killer" there must be reasons to believe that it will have something to kill; see the statistics on the supposed strength of the Russian submarine fleet.

Then there is the budget item about the first atomic-powered submarine. The release of the budget item about such a submarine had been preceded by numerous statements that the Atomic Energy Commission and independent firms had collaborated in developing a nuclear-energy powerplant for ships, to be tested first in a submarine. Apparently, as of the Spring of 1951, the development was finished so that such a powerplant could be constructed full scale and it was time to ask for the money to build the submarine to go with the powerplant.

One might well ask why, in this alleged age of air power, the two largest mutually inimical political units on the face of this planet are paying so much attention to undersea craft. Why don't they just build airplanes instead? Airplanes are fast, their range increases practically every week and their carrying capa-

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city is going up too, although in the case of military aircraft most of the increased carrying capacity is converted into range by lugging additional fuel. Submarines, on the other hand, are slow and while their carrying capacity is high, they need almost every ounce of it for their own complicated machinery. They do have range, but by now it is less than that of aircraft.

There is, however, one factor which speaks in favor of the submarine, the same factor which spurred submarine development originally. That is the potential invisibility of the submarine. Airplanes, no matter how high they fly, can be detected and intercepted. Their altitude, against the blue of the sky during the day and the black of the sky during the night and, under favorable conditions, the glare of the sun, ceased to be a protection with the invention of radar. Since radar waves are stopped by the surface of the water, radar is useless for the detection of submarines. And as far as one can tell the under-water equivalents of radar are not as good, nor as accurate. Almost certainly they have far less range.

Of course during two world wars the Allied counter measures against German submarines were ultimately successful. But the submarines involved still suffered from a large number of technological weaknesses. The original submarines all had to have dual propulsion systems, Diesel engines when cruising at the surface and electric motors for traveling submerged. The electric motors required enormous storage batteries. And every once in a while a submarine had to surface and use its Diesels to recharge the storage batteries. All this did not only use up space and carrying capacity, it was also tedious and greatly increased the vulnerability of the undersea ship.

During the second world war the Germans then developed the device which became known as the Snorkel or Schnorchel. I don't know what the word actually means, but I suspect that it is derived from the German verb *schnarchen* which means "to snore", presumably because the sound is similar. Now the Snorkel did away with the dual propulsion system, you could run on Diesel power even when submerged and thereby increase your speed. You could also throw out the electric motors and the heavy batteries with their tendency to develop annoying smells and toxic fumes. It was quite an important piece of progress in one respect, but not entirely without drawbacks. The Snorkel, in order to function, had to stick out of the water. And while it is comparatively small it is not invisible. Not to the eye and especially not to radar.

The nuclear-energy powerplant for submarines seems to be the answer to most of the problems. It does away with dual propulsion. It does away with an exhaust of any kind. It does away with the Snorkel or similar devices. It provides a prac-

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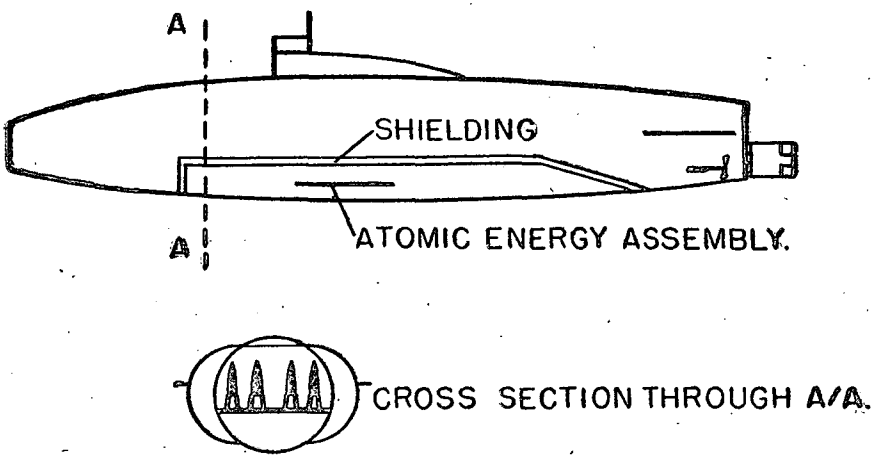

FIGURE 1

An atomic powered submarine probably operates on a closed-cycle steam turbine, the whole assembly placed at the lowest possible point under heavy shielding.

Missiles would probably be located amidships.

A missile-carrying submarine would not carry torpedo tubes but just a long-barreled dual purpose gun, both for small naval targets such as PT boats and against air attack.

tically unlimited cruising range. And while it may weigh as much as the older types of propulsion machinery it is apt to take up much less space so that life in a submerged submarine may be a little more comfortable than it used to be.

How does this powerplant work? For very obvious reasons there is no information about that, but one can guess at the principle. If you put uranium, somewhat enriched with U-235, into a so-called pile and let the reaction start, the pile will heat up. It is a well-known fact that piles have to be cooled and in ordinary operation they are probably cooled quite efficiently. But there seems to be no reason why one should not run a pile at around 500-600 degrees Fahrenheit. All the construction materials of a pile, the graphite blocks, the structural steel, the cadmium rods and the tubing can take such a temperature without any trouble. But if you run it at such a temperature the cooling water put in on one side will appear as steam at the other end. That steam could then drive a turbine, be afterwards recondensed into water (there is enough cold sea water outside the hull for cooling the condenser) and be sent back into the pile.

The actual system may not be as simple. For one reason or another

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it may be another liquid which is used for cooling; it could be mercury, for example. And the steam or vapor coming from the pile may not drive the turbine directly but be used to heat uncontaminated water into steam. Or the turbine may not drive the propellers directly but be coupled with an electric generator, somewhat along the lines of the Diesel-electric drive for railroad engines. At any event the whole would almost certainly be a closed system, serviced by remote control and separated from the remainder of the craft by heavy shielding. Most likely it would be placed in the very bottom of the hull.

Powered by nuclear energy the submarine would not need to hesitate to travel a longer but safer route for reasons of fuel economy. It would not have to surface unless it is perfectly safe to do so. There is no guarantee that it would be faster than Diesel powered craft, but it would not betray its presence by the plume of a Snorkel. And it may have a much lower noise level.

Government-employed naval architects and weapon's men may be sitting in conferences right now, debating the question of the most practical armament for such a submarine. That it would carry one or two medium-sized rifles, say of about 6 inches caliber, both for anti-aircraft protection and for the reduction of minor surface targets is obvious. But these guns would be what is called secondary armament. What should the "main" armament be?

Traditionally the main armament of a submarine is the torpedo, an admittedly powerful weapon. That the useful range of even a very modern torpedo is relatively short did not matter too much originally; very often the victim became aware of the presence of a hostile submarine when he saw the wake of the torpedo. By now anti-submarine detection devices certainly have as much range as the torpedo, if not longer. As everybody knows experiments have been made with missiles launched from a submarine. The missile used was the U.S. Navy *Loon*, an improved version of the German V-1. But while it worked and will probably be effective it does not look like the best possible armament that can be devised. In order to fire a *Loon* or a similar winged missile the submarine has to come to the surface. And the *Loon*, once it is airborne, can be intercepted, it could be shot down by carrier-based jet fighters. How much good such a missile could do would depend mostly on what the enemy could do about the missile. And that can be a lot.

A rocket missile, not travelling along a "flightpath" but along a trajectory like a projectile, is virtually non-interceptible. Of course it can be detected by radar while it is on its way but that is about all the enemy can do about it. In future decades the problem of the counter-rocket may be solved, right now it is

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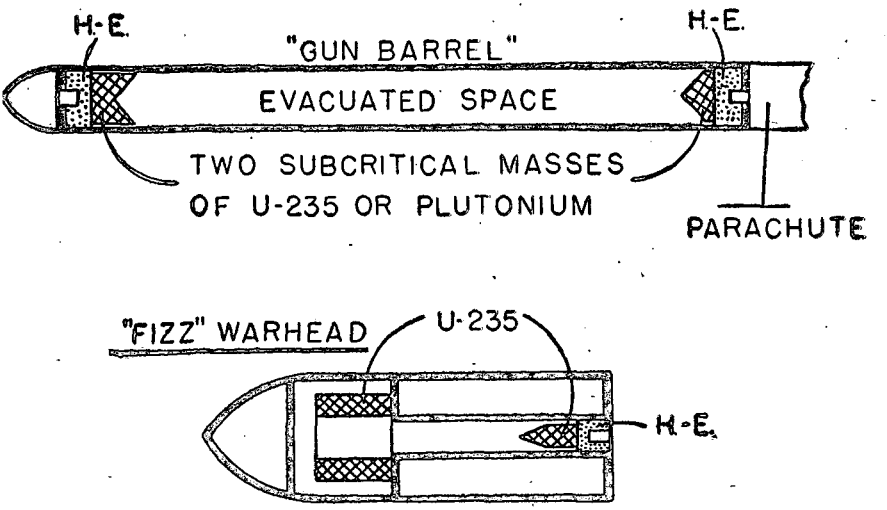

FIGURE 2

Principle of the "Hiroshima Bomb". Two subcritical masses of either U-235 or Plutonium are located some distance apart and then "shot" together to form one mass which is larger than critical mass and therefore blows up. The space between the two subcritical masses is probably evacuated so that they can move unimpeded.

The so-called "Fizz" warhead violates just the two main principles of the atomic bomb. The two masses brought together are probably subcritical even afterwards and they do not need to be brought together in such a super hurry. Result: a "fizz" reaction which evaporates the whole by its heat and causes an explosion intermediate in size between TNT and tru A-Bomb.

till a problem. Hence a rocket missile seems to be the most logical bet as armament for a long range submarine raider. But while an atomic powered submarine may have a little more elbow room inside than other submarines there is still a limit to available space in any submarine. The number of rounds it can carry must be relatively small. Consequently the missiles should be as effective as possible.

Here the concept of the "fizz bomb" may prove useful. The principle of the atomic bomb, as you know, is based on the sudden establishment of "critical mass". The element plutonium is, of course, radio-active. It also happens to be a strong poison from the chemical point of view. But in spite of these two characteristics it can still be said to be relatively harmless as long as the amount of plutonium

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present stays below a certain value. What this "certain value" is is a military secret too, some guesses published by competent men place "critical mass" at 20 kilograms or about 44 lbs. Therefore, as long as you have only 30 lbs. of plutonium in one piece, you'll be reasonably safe. But if you add another 15 lbs. or so the whole will blow up.

The problem does not consist just in adding another 15 lbs. The problem consists in adding it *fast*. Atomic scientists always used the example that you shoot a plutonium bullet of the proper weight into a plutonium "target" of the proper weight. One could probably do that by taking a long gun barrel, evacuating it, placing two sub-critical masses of plutonium at the ends with a high-explosive charge behind each one and firing the two charges as nearly simultaneously as is possible. That would bring the two sub-critical masses together in the center of the barrel, critical mass would result and an atomic explosion follow a split second later. The Hiroshima bomb is rumored to have been constructed on that principle. But the critical mass in the Hiroshima bomb apparently did not form fast enough, for the scientists thought up another system. It is probably much better but must entail a great deal of auxiliary equipment, for it has been released that an atomic bomb is about 20 feet long, has a diameter of better than 10 feet and an overall weight of more than 10,000 lbs.

There is no rocket in existence yet which could carry such a bomb as a payload. And if there were, it would not fit into a submarine.

Supposing now that you brought your two sub-critical masses together too slowly on purpose. Or that you brought them together in such a way that they failed to make perfect contact with each other, for example by shooting your plutonium bullet through a hole in the plutonium target. What would happen? Well, obviously only a relatively small portion of the plutonium would go into fission. And while the fission, in time, might spread to the remainder of the plutonium present, there would be no time for that. For the explosion of even a small portion of the plutonium would tear the bomb apart and scatter the remaining plutonium over the landscape. Possibly the heat of the fission of a small portion may be enough to vaporize everything else.

Apart from the radio-active by-products such an explosion would probably look very much like any other explosion. Its power would fall far behind that of an atomic bomb, although *it would still be several times that of TNT.*

When this was realized, atomic scientists were quite disdainful about such a "faulty performance". "This would be just a fizzle", they said to each other and went ahead to make the A-bomb "fizzle proof." But a while later it was realized that

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ust such a "fizzle" may be useful nder certain circumstances. The rue A-bomb is far too destructive to e a front line weapon. It could e used only a long distance from the earest friendly units. A "fizz omb", just because it is "weak", night be a front line weapon.

In addition to such tactical conderations one must not lose sight f the little fact that the most efective weapon imaginable is of no se whatever unless you can deliver t. And a full-sized A-bomb, weighng, as is now known, over 10,000 bs., is not easily delivered. A "fizz omb", lacking most of the auxiliary quipment (whatever it may be) hich makes the large bomb effiient, may weigh as little as 500 lbs. ts delivery would be simplified correspondingly. True, instead of havng the explosive force of 20,000 tons f TNT it might have only that of oo tons of TNT. "Only." But oo tons of TNT — or rather the lestructive power of that much highxplosive — in the right place at he proper time may turn out to be lecisive.

Such "fizz-bombs" open up the ossibility of "atomic artillery." And hey would be light enough for melium-sized missiles, the kind of misiles which one could put aboard a ubmarine.

Well then, why not arm the subnarine with a large rifle that can ire atomic projectiles. A gun is nore accurate by far than a missile. And it probably will stay more accurate for some time to come. And on a naval vessel the weight problem is in favor of a gun too. For while a gun is in itself rather heavy, its ammunition weighs less than missiles which are the equivalent in destructive power. If you can carry only five or ten or even twenty rounds, the missiles weigh less because you do not have to carry the weight of the gun. But a gun with 300 rounds of ammunition weighs less than 300 missiles.

This is true, but the missile is superior in another respect. A gun with a range of 25-30 miles is about the biggest piece of useful ordnance which can be produced. Longer artillery ranges are not impossible, but the guns then grow freakish and the projectiles have to be light. However, a missile with a 30-mile range is still a comparatively small missile. A missile of the size which could go into a submarine should have a range of around 30 miles, twice the longest useful gun range.

It looks, therefore, as if the main armament of a submarine with world-wide cruising range should consist of trajectory missiles, rockets with a range somewhat beyond artillery range, carrying "fizz bomb" warheads. The combination of such a submarine with such missiles looks like the perfect weapon for sudden and unsuspected fire assaults on enemy installations at or near the shore.

THE END

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NEWS OF THE MONTH

Latest reports on what our readers are doing. Fan clubs, social events and personalities in the limelight.

Since from all indications we are about to be deludged with science-fiction movies, there are a couple which we would like to cite as probable examples of the type of films we can expect.

On the one side of the scale we have THE THING, the much publicized version of John W. Campbell's *Who Goes There?* While the movie differs greatly from the book, the producers have come through with a film that is highly entertaining and has its full quota of suspense and excitement. The actors approached their roles seriously and, with a couple of minor exceptions, handled them convincingly and competently. The more watchful fan will note several flaws in the scientific details of the story, but by and large, they do not detract from the suspense and entertainment value of the movie. If future science-fiction movies were produced as capably as THE THING fans would have little to complain about.

However, on the other side of the scale we have the hopelessly outweighed THE MAN FROM PLANET X— and, it is to be feared that this is a preview of what we can expect the majority of science-fiction films to be. For the most part, any fan would quail at the thought of having the term "science-fiction" applied to movies of this type. The technical flaws were so many and so obvious as to be laughable. The plot and general theme of the story can be deduced from the five central characters: A grotesque and unbelievable alien from outer space (wearing a rubber mask which permitted no facial expressions, a fish-bowl helmet and numerous weird gadgets); an elderly, benevolent scientist; his young, beautiful daughter; a sinister, powerhungry scientist; and last, but by no means least our handsome hero. Place the scene in a dismal castle on a lonely, fog-bound Scottish moor and—well, you take it from there. You can probably reconstruct the plot for yourself, complete with the fadeout sequence of the boy and girl conversing quite seriously about Man's future contacts with alien life-forms

To switch from the make-believe world of movies to the reality of every day affairs, we'd like to mention that two of our science-fictionists are returning to the armed forces this summer. Frank Robinson, whose stories have been appearing in AS aSF, etc., informs us that he has been recalled by the Navy, and will be a little too busy helping Uncle Sam to do much writing for a while. George Earley, the Miami University fan who did the inside cover feature for the May OW, dropped us a card the other day saying that he's re-entering the Air Force as a 2nd Lieutenant this summer and expects to be stationed near Wilmington Delaware.

Those of you who attended the Midwest Conference at Indian Lake

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NEWS OF THE MONTH

Ohio in May already know how successful it was and what a good time everyone had. Those of you who missed it should decide right now to be there next year.

At the conference this year there were opportunities for swimming and boating; original illustrations and cover paintings were raffled and auctioned off; and for science-fiction discussions you had professionals like L. A. Eshbach, Charles R. Tanner, Oliver Saari, T. E. Dikty, Randall Garrett, Frank Robinson, Bob Tucker and others to talk to. While the fans came mainly from Illinois, Ohio and Indiana, the conference was by no means limited to these three states. The Detroit group turned out in full strength, and two fans (Ned McKeown and Willie Grant) came all the way from Toronto, Canada.

It was decided at this conference that the next one would be held at the same place, approximately the same time—the early part of May. Plan to be there if you can, it's something you won't want to miss.

Poul Anderson just phoned our office this morning. He was passing through Chicago on his way to the East Coast, and from there he's continuing on to Europe for the summer. His route will take him first to England, and then on to the continent to visit Denmark, France, Germany and Italy, returning home about the latter part of September. Sounds like a wonderful way to spend the summer, and we'll have to admit that our words of congratulation were more than slightly tinged with envy.

Julian May, who co-edits Interim Newsletter (an international fanzine) with Lyell Crane, has sold a story entitled "Dune Roller" to aSF, which will be published in one of the Fall issues. When Julian was first introduced at the Midwest Conference, Ned McKeown took one look, gulped, and then spoke for all present when he said "And to think that I've been addressing my letters to *Mr.* Julian May! For Julian is "Judy" May, a pretty, petite little girl who looks like she'd be more at home on the cover of a magazine than writing science-fiction stories. It looks like we have one more addition to the growing ranks of women in science-fiction and a lovely addition she is, too.

A while back we wrote to Willy Ley asking if he would be interested in doing an article on the possibility of using submarines to launch atomic missiles. The result you can see in this issue—the striking cover painting by James Settles and the article "America's Secret Weapon?" The follow-up to the incident is that a few days ago we received a news clipping from Mr. Ley underlined in red pencil, which discussed guided missiles from the standpoint of both the Air Force and the Navy, and quoted Under Secretary of the Navy Kimball as saying "It is only a matter of time until we build submarines specifically designed to launch missiles." We know that things move fast in this world today, but we hadn't realized just how fast! Our main thought at present is to get the article on the *probability* of these missile-launching submarines on the stands before they become a reality. Science-fiction's big problem now seems to be the task of keeping the scientists from treading too closely on the heels of our "fictional inventions."

THE END

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MY STRUGGLE

By Floyd Scrilch
As told to Robert Bloch

"SCRILCHIE," said my wife. "Why aren't you like other men?"

"What do you mean, honey?" I asked, expecting the usual sarcastic answer.

"Well, take like Bill Smith down the block," said my wife. "Two months ago he was just a common clerk like you. Then he started to take a course in DIANETICS, and only yesterday he stepped into a Big Paying Job."

"I know what Bill Smith stepped into," I retorted, bitterly. But she had started me thinking. Here I was, stuck in a rut, no Get Up and Go, no Aggressiveness, no Dynamic Personality. Why couldn't I convince a Big Employer that I was Valuable?

The next day I went out and bought a copy of DIANETICS FOR EVERYBODY AT HOME IN YOUR SPARE TIME, and I began to study. Yessir, if other fellows could become new personalities, if other people could be "cleared" and find new success, so could I. I was serious about it. So serious that I read the book down at the office and the boss heard about it and fired me.

But I didn't care. My wife yelled bloody murder when I told her, but I knew I was going to make the little woman Proud. So I just sat around the house reading the book. I read it in bed and at the table, and by the time she grabbed it away from me and threw it in the garbage, I was ready to go to a Psychiatric Clinic and undergo a DIANETICS treatment. The landlord said he'd throw us out if we didn't pay the rent, but I had to use the money for my treatments. I didn't worry. Pretty soon we were going to be on Easy Street!

After two months I was "cleared". Not only "cleared" but I knew all the proper Psychological Approaches to Handling My Life. I took a lot of notes, but I had to burn them for fuel on account of we didn't have any coal. But my memory was perfect now and I knew everything - - the Proper Way to Enter an Office, and the Approach, and How to Appear Successful and How to Interest an Employer and Clinching the Deal. I felt aggressive and self-confident. I determined to see the head of the biggest firm in town.

The Big Day arrived. I awoke, took 50 deep breaths, a cold shower, and I was off. Oh, yeah, I dress-

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ed, too.

I entered the office confidently. The girl at the desk quailed before my masterful glance and led me straight to the boss's private office.

The boss was busy, but I swept the papers off his desk, sat down, and fired my proposition at him like a shot. I held his interest from the first; my glance never wavered until he dropped his eyes. I felt a surge of power, dominance, confidence. I couldn't lose with DIANETICS!

"How about that job, now?" I said, laughing boldly. I knew it was the Psychological Moment.

The boss eyed me and I could see him trying to resist, to be firm. I just gave him that old confident, aggressive grin. He stared at my shined shoes, my creased trousers, my natty tie, my clean fingernails, my well-groomed hair, my gleaming smile. For a long moment I held him helpless. Then he rose with a sheepish grin.

And he kicked me out on my face.

THE END

NOLACON

9TH WORLD SCIENCE-FICTION CONVENTION

Yes, it's drawing near that time when science-fiction fans and professionals start marking the days off the calendar and making plans to attend the annual science-fiction convention over the Labor Day weekend. You remember, just to mention a few, the Chicon, the Denvention, the Torcon, the Cinvention and last year's Norwescon? Even if you didn't attend any of them you probably read the advance publicity and the write-ups of these affairs. And speaking of advance publicity, that brings us to the purpose of this article—we want to call your attention to the Nolacon, the 9th World Science-Fiction Convention which will be held in the fabulous city of New Orleans.

Those of you who have attended previous conventions will need no urging to start you on your way to Louisiana, but for those readers who have never been to a convention—here are a few facts you ought to know.

In conventioneering, the first step is to join the membership committee. Even if you can't attend the convention, by sending in your membership dollar you get a good return for your money. For one thing, there's the knowledge that you're doing your part to make the convention possible, since your money helps cover the cost of staging the convention. For those who demand a more material return for their dollar, you receive: 1) a membership card (this year's "cards" are made of aluminum); 2) the pre-convention bulletins which tell you how the plans are progressing, which fans and professionals are going to attend. and what the tentative pro-

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gram will be; 3) a copy of the Nolacon Program Booklet. This, considering the decreased purchasing power of the dollar, is certainly a good buy.

Now, having joined the Membership Committee, it's time to do something about transportation to New Orleans. Airplane? Train? Bus? Automobile? Whichever method you choose, you can usually find someone from your vicinity who is convention-bound and would welcome company for the trip. The Nolacon Bulletin No. 1 contains a list of the names and addresses of fans planning to attend, and notices of fans who are driving to New Orleans and looking for passengers—usually on a "share the expenses" basis. Or how about forming a caravan? Some fan groups such as the Detroit clan, for example, have a habit of piling into cars and journeying *en masse* to conventions. It decreases the cost and increases the enjoyment of the trip.

Next, hotel accommodations. Also in Bulletin No. 1 you'll find a list of quite a few New Orleans hotels and the various rates they charge. To make it easier for you, all you have to do is choose your hotel, write to the Nolacon secretary, and he will arrange for your reservation. The convention will be held at the St. Charles Hotel, and a group of rooms has been set aside for the fans. If you get your reservation in right away, you'll probably be able to get a room right in the heart of all the Nolacon activities.

That takes care of your membership, transportation and accommodations, so it's time to talk about the convention itself. Conventions as anyone who has ever attended one will tell you, are fun. And a science-fiction convention is more fun than any other type of convention. Where else could you meet your favorite authors, artists, editors and publishers and discuss their work with them? And all the active fans whose names are familiar to you because they publish fanzines or are avid letter-writers—you'll get a chance to meet them in person. Fans like Bob Tucker, Ned McKeown, Nancy Moore, George Young, Frank Dietz, Martin Alger, Don Ford, Roy and Deedee Lavender and a hundred or so more.

There's quite an impressive list of pros who expect to attend the Nolacon, also. Among them are E. E. "Skylark" Smith, Stan Mullen, E. Everett Evans, Mack Reynolds, Frederic Brown, Walt Sheldon, Robert Bloch, Anthony Boucher, Lloyd A. Eshbach, Rog Phillips, Randall Garrett, Boris Dolgov and Hans Stefan Santesson. E. Everett Evans is scheduled to give a talk on the history of fandom, Doc Smith will mediate a panel discussion, and Stan Mullen, Jack Speer and Dan McPhail have not yet revealed the subjects of their speeches. This, of course, is a very tentative line-up, and may be changed by convention-time.

Science - fiction conventions are composed of two main parts—the formal and informal sessions. The formal sessions consist of introductions of well-known fans and pros, speeches, panel discussions, the auction and the banquet. The informal sessions take place in the evenings after the conclusion of the day's scheduled events. It is here that you gather with fans and pros to spend hours talking about science-fiction, science-fictionists and any other topics that occur to you. These sessions usually last until the approaching dawn warns you that it's time to get ready for the next day's program, and are the chief reason conventioneers begin to look rather

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haggard by the time the convention draws to a close.

The foregoing should give you a brief, but general, idea of what to expect at a science-fiction convention. But, just as it's a difficult job trying to explain science-fiction to an outsider, it's even more impossible to explain a convention to someone who hasn't been there. Just try to tell them about the thrill of bidding at the auction and taking home the original of that illustration you coveted from such-and-such magazine; the excitement of meeting face to face your favorite authors; and most of all, about the lasting friendships that are formed at these times. No that's the side of the convention that you have to take part in really to appreciate. And that's the *real* reason you should send your membership dollar to:

Harry B. Moore
2703 Camp Street
New Orleans 13, La.

And, start planning now to be in New Orleans September 1, 2 and 3 for The Ninth World Science-Fiction Convention—*THE NOLACON!*

Test Piece Contest Winners

The following readers of OTHER WORLDS are winners in Eric Frank Russell's "Test Piece" contest in our March issue. We are listing the 51st and last place winner first, since everybody seemed to be determined to get into that coveted position! Yes, this certainly was an unusual contest. And, proving the old adage " . . . the last shall come first" to a certain extent, at least here we go:

51st PRIZE . . . H. T. Bowers, 134 Second Street, N. W., New Philadelphia, Ohio. Mr. Bowers won that One Week Vacation with all expenses paid on Ray Palmer's Amherst, Wisconsin farm.

1st PRIZE . . . Donald J. Lehmer, P. O. Box 356, Tahlequah, Okla. Don gets $100.00 in cash he won't have to wait ten years to spend.

2nd PRIZE . . . Bertram R. Brown, 8 Stecher Street, Newark, N. J. An original cover painting by H. W. McCauley. A glance at the front cover of NEXT issue will tell you what he's getting.

3rd PRIZE . . . Jack Cassidy, 8212 S. E. 28th Street, Mercer Island, Wash. He's going to be reading OTHER WORLDS and FATE free for the rest of his life as a lifetime subscriber.

4th PRIZE . . . Hal Rosen, 2053 E. 96th Street, Cleveland, Ohio. A five year free sentence to reading OTHER WORLDS.

5th PRIZE . . . Ruth E. Morse, 87-52 Chevy Chase Street, Jamaica 3 L. I., N. Y. The next twenty-four issues of OTHER WORLDS in her mailbox.

6th to 25th PRIZES . . . (each one gets the next twelve issues of OTHER WORLDS) . . .

Frederic Brown (how'd that professional get in here!) Box 1394, Taos, N. M.

Donald M. Richardson, 2312 Oregon Street, Berkeley 5, Calif.

Harry W. Wiese, 3662 W. George Street, Chicago 18, Ill.

Rena Mandelbaum, 1931 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Charles M. Foster, P. O. Box 1160, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Robert D. Gilliland, 520 N. Well-

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er Street, Ottumwa, Iowa.
Evelyn Catoe, 323 Powers Street, New Brunswick, N. J.
Eric Holmes, P. O. Box 2814, Stanford, Calif.
Donald Dryfoos, 151 E 80th Street, New York, N. Y.
Stanley Gaskill, P. O. Box 265, Guilford College, N. C.
H. C. Spiselman, 23 College Lane, Westbury, N. Y.
Alice Sprague, 497 W. Ferry Street, Buffalo 13, N. Y.
Shirley Marsh, 13039 Sixth Place S. W., Seattle 66, Wash.
Carl O. Roach, 2155 Madison Avenue, New York 35, N. Y.
Ronald Gillings, 115 Wanstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex, England.
C. B. Stevenson, 521 E. Monroe, Phoenix, Arizona.
Lewis J. Conway, Ward 2, Liverpool Chest Hospital, Mt. Pleasant, Liverpool, England.
Paul Learn, 209 N. Thurlow Avenue, Margate, N. J.
Jim McConnell, 242 E. Wichita Street, Shreveport, La.

26th to 50th PRIZES . . . (each an original illustration from OTHER WORLDS) . . .

Edward Wellen, 167 Centre Avenue, New Rochelle, N. Y.
R. F. Acker, 413½ E. 6th Street, Port Clinton, Ohio.
Victor Parsonnet, 710 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Ill.
Martin Rosen, H. & S. Co., 297th EAB, Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.
Don L. Kyler, 2069 W. 58th Street, Cleveland, 2, Ohio.
Lt. Daniel Constant, 3603 Memphis Street, El Paso, Texas.
Winona M. Phillips, 636 12th Street, Manhattan Beach, Calif.
J. C. Abbey, 8343 Minard Road, RFD 2, Parma Michigan.
Grace M. Kay, 429 E. Angeleno Ave, Burbank, Calif.
Virginia H. McNaul, Box 215 Roxbury, N. Y.
Harold D. Kaiser, 7 Brooklyn Avenue, Buffalo 8, N. Y.
Joseph B. Lambkin, 206 2nd Street, Bremerton, Wash.
Henry Wilson, RD 1 Mifflinburg, Pa.
W. E. Jenkins, 3112 5th Avenue, Charleston 2, W. Va.
John R. Beck, RD 3, Knox, Pa.
Mrs. R. L. Pillard, 77 Midway Drive, Napa, Calif.
A. J. Youngmark, 101 Front Street, Watsonville, Calif.
Norman Borken, M. D., 2910 Bronx Park East, Bronx, N. Y.
Dirce C. Archer, 1453 Barnsdale Street, Pittsburgh 17, Pa.
L. J. Stecher, Jr., R 1, Box 1067, La Mesa, Calif.
R. S. Miller, 676 S. Rampart, Los Angeles, Calif.
L. B. Peirce, W4KIX, 8 Clubview Street, Montgomery, Ala.
Robert F. Metzger, 194-14 112 Road, St. Albans 12, N. Y.
R. A. Friedrich, 179 South Avenue, Hawthorne, N. J.
Louis K. O'Leary, (tie for 50th prize), 1582 48th Avenue, San Francisco 22, Calif.
P. K. Davis (tie for 50th prize) 77 Valley Ave., Newburgh, N. Y.
R. J. Nemmers (tie for 50th prize), 2424½ Lincoln Way, Ames, Iowa.

Congratulations from the staff of OTHER WORLDS to the winners. In winning, they demonstrated a high degree of racial tolerance, and we are proud to announce that not one of them would tolerate the use of the two words in "Test Piece" today, much less hundreds of years from now. There just isn't such a thing as a " - - - - - - - - ". And we'd be the last magazine to print the words! So if you don't know what they are, congratulations to you also! The Editors

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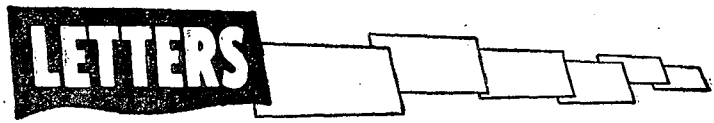

RALPH P. BELSINGER

I am tired of Adam and Eve stories. I am sick and tired of Adam and Eve stories. My heart leaps down when I behold an Adam and Eve story. Really, Rap, *Red Coral* was not one of your better efforts. Written in a hurry, possibly to justify the cover?

The cover itself was beautiful. The covers Bok has been doing for OW and IMAGINATION lately are efforts for which I can't find enough superlatives. However, the covers of late have been improving while the quality of the stories deteriorates. (This is merely constructive criticism, I'm still buying the mag, ain't I?) Your covers run third best in the field. (1-aSF, 2-Galaxy.)

Now, where was I? The local disc-jockey just played Spike Jones' version of the "Dance of the Hours" and I'm somewhat confused. Apropos of which your lead story, *If Ye Have Faith*, left me the same way although I liked it. Lester del Rey always has unusual and provocative ideas behind his stories, and this was no exception. I imagine you'll get quite a few letters from bigots of one sort and another, but ignore 'em. We're (me and my pet Hoka) with you.

Heroes Are Made—this is the stuff of which laughter is born. Not profound, but thoroughly enjoyable.

Vision—cute; no further comment.

Little Miss Martian—pure hack. The first story was good; nice idea behind it. But Miss Ignorance's super-brain solves enigma after super-enigma just in the nick of time. Stf has advanced beyond that sort of thing. The story belonged in Amazing or F. A., which are admittedly slanted at an adolescent audience.

The City—nice. Never heard of Bounds before, sounds like a pseudonym—but if this is a sample of his work, let's have more. Hmmmm. S. J. B. S. J. Byrne, perhaps?

Tails You Lose—more hack. Another story strayed from A. S.

The Man From Mars— excellent, as Phillips' usually is, but too short to really work out the idea. No intimation of the ending. Better than *If Ye Have Faith* in that respect. Everything was becoming so idyllic in *Faith* that you knew that somehow the Being (who was never actually named God by the author) would turn out to have feet of clay.

The Rocket Man—inferior imitation of Bradbury. Nuff sed. Nuff written. Goodbye.

Wilberforce State College
Wilberforce, Ohio

We've often wondered why science-fiction fans have a tendency to think that every new writer they run across is a pseudonym for someone else. Take our word for it, Sydney J. Bounds and Stuart J. Byrne are two separate people—and a good thing it is, too, since that means we can bring you stories by both authors. We'll thank you for your criticism and take it in the spirit in which it is offered, an effort to keep us headed toward our goal - - a better and better OTHER WORLDS.

—Ed.

ELDON EVERETT

Better late than everett, and here's

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Everett again. Whoopee, my letter was published in the May ish.

Sincerely, Palmer is a great author, but I'd rather see him write under a pseudonym. It's more fun to try to guess who the author is.

I sure wish people would stop knocking Shaver. I don't quite believe his stuff, but wot hoppen to the flying saucers? I haven't seen a newspaper article in three months. That ought to prove something.

Now to rate the stories: *If Ye Have Faith*—stinko, stinko, stinko; *Vision* — that Venable character comes up with a cute yarn, but the illo was horrible; *Heroes Are Made* —Wunderbar! And Cartier's illo the same way. *Little Miss Martian*—goody, goody! *The City*—yum, yum, yum! *Tails You Lose*—lose what? *Man From Mars*—good, but Phillips is becoming stale. *Red Coral*—why, Ray, you're slipping. Hooray for Bok! *The Rocket Man* best story in the ish, with the worst illo.

I second Coriell's wish. Buy a John Coleman Burroughs fantasy novel. That guy can write. I remember his novels for TWS 'way back when'.

Anybody got "Bride of Frankenstein" for sale or trade? Hey, any of your Burroughs fans, write to me and if I can afford it I'll write back.

P. O. Box 513
Tacoma, Wash.

Taken all in all, Eldon, you seemed to like the May issue. And be sure to get a copy of the October OTHER WORLDS, because it contains a terrific story by a couple of your favorite authors—Richard S. Shaver and Chester Geier.—Ed.

DON NIELSON

Though I've been a fan for five years, this is the first letter I've written so I won't be too surprised if I don't see it in print. But after reading your letter column so darn much, I just got lonely.

I haven't missed an issue of your mag yet, but the May issue is the first one to move me to send my gripes in. It must have been the cover—I didn't like it. Not gaudy exactly, but—well — cluttered. The stories were fairly good. No real blanks, anyway. *The City* was tops. Pin some laurels on Mr. Bounds. *Vision* and *Red Coral* were good, but the rest were bunched in the mediocre group. (Well, maybe *Tails You Lose* reared its head out of the pack.) On the whole, though, the ish was below past standards.

But don't get me wrong; I like your mag fine. The stories are well above the usual run of stf, the art work is (as a rule) great, and the length of the stories is well selected. It's gonna take a lot worse than the May issue to knock OW off the pedestal it's on in my opinion.

406 West Elm St.
Urbana, Illinois

We're sorry you didn't think the May issue was up to standard, and when we say that, we really mean it. We know "you can't please all of the people all of the time" but we certainly wish we could. That's why we're so willing to listen to the suggestions we receive, and — if a large number of the readers approve—follow them. We want to keep OW up on that pedestal for you, so let us know how this issue strikes you.—Ed.

JOSEPH T. SHIPLEY

I should like to call to your attention, and I shall appreciate your letting your readers know, that I am at work on a dictionary of science-fiction terms. I shall be happy to hear from readers who may wish

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to suggest words for inclusion in such a complilation. I am including new words, existing words in new combinations, and existing words that are given new applications or meanings.

Readers should send, for each word, the meaning, the author, the title of the story and the date of its publication.

29 West 46th St.
New York 19, New York

We think you'll find science-fiction fans more than happy to co-operate with you on this project, and we'd like you to keep us posted on your progress so that we can be among the first to order a copy.—Ed.

SHELBY VICK

I could blather all about how wonderful the May issue of OW was—the Bok cover and all. I could tell you how glad I am that you don't have any one artist to do the bulk of your work, but a good variety instead. I could compliment John Grossman on his art. I could toss roses to the story *The Rocket Man.* I could say that you're a darned good editor (tho a poor propagandist, as witnessed by *Red Coral*). I could toss about all kind of egoboo.

But I won't.

You wouldn't be interested in hearing all that.

Nahhhhh.

Instead, I'll get right to the meat of things. I'm hoping this reaches you in time for publication, 'cause it has some rather important fan news in it. Ye ken *Quandry?* (One of the country's finest fanzines!) Wull, editor Lee Hoffman is planning on a big, gala annish — 50 pages. But this, Hoffman informs me, requires a certain commodity in green, variously referred to as dough, moola, filthy lucre, *ad nostalgia.* If however, lots 'n' lots of your readers will purchase booster ads everything should be hundy-dory. For such consideration, friend Hoffman and self will be grateful. All monies or queries should be sent to Lee Hoffman, 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Ga.

Thanks muchly.

Keep up the good work with OW. Just a couple of things—when might you bring it down to two bits, and where's them staples?

Box 493
Lynn Haven, Florida

Glad to help you along on the publicity for the special issue of Quandry, Vic. You didn't give any deadline, so I hope this is still in time. As for bringing the mag down to 25c *haven't you noticed that some of the others are raising their prices instead of lowering them. And anyway, we keep telling you that you can get it for a quarter a copy if you subscribe.—Ed.*

JERRY HUNTER

Telling editors all about their magazines is my favorite sport. It inflates my ego to the bursting point. Anyway, if I may quote 647,819 other writers, "I enjoy your stories so much!" Especially the good ones.

I don't know if anyone has congratulated you on the really fine points of OW, so I'll do it right now.

1. The Personals Column. Never saw anything like this before. It shows that you're unselfish, and until it gets to the "John, come home, all is forgiven. Martha" stage, it's the best idea in years.

2. By giving every other magazine a plug, you'll become the most popular one in the business before long. So few editors seem to realize that they have competition. The guy who said "kill 'em with kindness" knew what he was philosophizing about.

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3. Covers. Always covers. So far, you've had one excellent cover, a buncha good and mediocre ones, and one lousy blurb which adorned, of course, an issue in which a Shaver story was featured. (Your first issue, I do believe.) All in all, your cover average is average, which puts it in 3rd place among stf and fantasy prozines.

4. The stories are good so far. By the way, there are four kinds of stories. All stories, long or short, fall into these classifications: excellent stories, good ones, fair ones, and last and least—Shaver stories.

5. Almost through. Only one more to go and you can read the good letters. I see that you're using new authors (or perhaps new pen names?) This is good. But there are others, you know. Mustn't forget them. Asimov, deCamp & Pratt, van Vogt, Sturgeon and Poul Anderson write just the bestest things.

That's it. I'm all thought out. Oh, yes, quit putting in plugs for Amazing Stories. They've been dead for more than 10-leven years, to all practical purposes. And no An-lab ratings, because they don't mean anything anyway. Your magazine does, though. It means the others will have to keep on their toes. It's a sign of an indication, or sumpin'.

4612 E. New York St.
Indianapolis, Indiana

Well, Jerry, that's a rather extensive analysis of OW. The Personals we certainly intend to keep—and we think that an occasional "John, come home. Martha" notice might even be acceptible. We'll keep on plugging our competitors, because when more people read more magazines, it improves the field as a whole—besides, we don't want our readers to miss a good story just because it wasn't printed in OW. So our covers are only average, hm? Well, we think that most of them have been above average—but then we're probably prejudiced. Of the authors you suggested, check back and you'll see that 50% of them have had stories in OW—and we'll see what we can do about raising that percentage.
—Ed.

EMORY H. MANN

Just finished reading the May OTHER WORLDS and found it much more enjoyable than the March issue. It is a more cheerful issue, if you know what I mean—the stories had happier endings.

Your story is different, to say the least, and very readable when you get to the interesting parts of it. Why you writers occasionally start off a story so interestingly, then stop for a couple of chapters of fill-in before finally returning to the interesting part, I'll never be able to understand.

While I'm in a critical mood I might as well say that Hannes Bok's paintings leave me cold. How you could get excited over a dame—even a nude one made especially for you—who looks like the one in the story illustration is beyond me. The one on the cover looks more human, but very unsubstantial. One good breeze would blow her away. She must have about a six inch waist-line. I'll take Bill Terry's Little Miss Martian—even if she is an android robot. At least she looks human.

I have to agree with you on the Edd Cartier illustration, it is the cutest illo I've seen for some time; it is strictly out of this world. I hope you give him other assignments that will give him a chance to produce more illos of this type.

Little Miss Martian is the best story, followed by *The Man From*

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Mars by Rog Phillips. The others were good—I liked them all.

Why all the controversy about Galaxy? Your editorial was clear enough concerning Gold. Personally I think that OTHER WORLDS has it all over Galaxy. I like the stories and the illos better.

While speaking of other stf mags, did you notice that TWS and SS had stories in the June and May issues about the same topics—Druids, trees, etc? Then the April Madge came out with Beyond The Farful Forest.

For my money, OW takes all the prizes, but I have to buy the others to keep up with the trends of thought in the field.

Hope you go monthly with OW before too long.

R. F. D. No. 1
West Townsend, Mass.

So the girl on the May cover was a little too fragile for you, hmm? Well, we suggest that you take a look at the next OW cover—a beautiful Mac girl that we're sure you have no cause to call insubstantial. And don't worry about us not keeping Cartier busy—we fully intend to as he's one of our favorites, also.
—Ed.

AGATHA SOUTHERN

Congratulations and deep salaams, also enthusiastic applause, for having the courage to print that wonderful story in the May OTHER WORLDS, *If Ye Have Faith.* It is one of the finest allegories I have ever read in my nearly 74 years of life. I have been a stf fan since way back in the 1890's and I think I have a right to tell you how very much that story impressed me. To me it carried a very deep and significant lesson.

The Martian story was also very fine, and carried a message between the lines.

All success to you and keep up the good work. I can't understand why so many editors are afraid to publish any story which deals with the Supreme Being.

22 Mulberry St.
New York, New York

We have consistantly stated that in OW we will bring to you the best stories we can, unencumbered by a set "policy" or fear of "taboo subjects", and we've printed quite a few stories to bear out this determination. Our "no policy" policy is based on the theory that our readers are mature enough to judge a story on its merits, and not on petty prejudices or bigotry. We are proud to be able to say that you readers have backed us up almost 100%—which is just what we expected of you.
—Ed.

DAVE C. BARDBURY

Although your magazines OTHER WORLDS and IMAGINATION do not yet represent the ultimate perfection in stf magazine publishing, they are fast approaching it. Such departments as Personals, covers such as that on the February IMAGINATION, and the well laid-out contents page—not to mention the top-line stories—are enough to content most fans. But not me, sir, and I note with pleasure that you are not sinking back on your laurels but that you recognize no "ceiling" and continue to improve with each issue.

There's just one thing I'd specifically like you to do, however. Make it possible for stf-starved English fans to subscribe to your mags and purchase the books you advertise. No? Then I can do no more than appeal to those great-hearted fans you've got over there to help me out by sending me some U. S. mags and books.

Hold it! This isn't an appeal for

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charity. I'll send English stf over in exchange—there's no shortage of pocket-books over here, and also NEW WORLDS, our "one and only" mag.

I'd like some teen age pen pals, too. I don't know if it's true that only typed letters get into your columns, but anyway, stick my appeal in Personals, will you? Thanks.

1, Grove Gardens
Frimley
Aldershot Hants
England

And thank you for the letter, Dave, but there are just three little matters we'd like to clear up. First, IMAGINATION is now published by Bill Hamling. Second, you most certainly can subscribe to OTHER WORLDS by International Money Order if you don't have American dollars. Third, we print the letters we receive whether they're typed, hand-written or carved on a chunk of wood.—Ed.

JERRY SYMMONDS

Having just finished your May issue of OW I had to write and congratulate you on your fine job.

This is my first letter to OW (or to any mag, for that matter) and I would like very much for you to publish it.

I have just a few things to say about OW. First, about the stories. In my opinion *Heroes Are Made, If Ye Have Faith, The City* and *Red Coral* were best. I especially liked *Heroes. Rocket Man* seemed rather like a story told to a small boy at bedtime, but it was pretty good. All in all, I enjoyed every story. The cover was good, as were the inside illustrations, especially the ones for *Vision* and *The City.*

I have been a science-fiction fan for about two years now. However, there are no other fans in my community. I would like very much to correspond with other fans between the ages of 16 and 20. I would really appreciate any letters.

Congratulations, again, on a fine mag.

Box 150
Lockwood, Missouri

Welcome to the correspondence circle of fandom, Jerry. And if our readers respond as wholeheartedly as they usually do, we think you'll be receiving plenty of letters. Next to reading and collecting science fiction, there'e nothing fans enjoy more than talking or writing about it.—Ed.

ROBERT P. HOSKINS

The Bok cover is beyootiful, simply beyootiful! When are you gonna give us some more like these? Soon, I hope. Your covers have been unusually good, with the March one being the worst. McCauley apparently didn't watch what he was doing.

Most of the stories were quite good this issue, with *Heroes Are Made* taking top honors. *Red Coral* reminds me of some of the stuff you had in FA back about ten years ago. Sydney J. Bounds (who's he?) turned out an enjoyable piece in *The City.* Evans' sequel left me cold, it seemed to have been ground out with one eye cocked towards an editor's deadline. As yet I haven't been able to make up my mind about *If Ye Have Faith.* It either stinks or is a classic, which I can't say.

Am waiting for the list of Shaverian names; also for the oft-postponed Bloch story. The suspense about the latter is killing me! I think you keep delaying it on purpose, Mr. Palmer. Am glad to see you have an R. Bretnor story scheduled. He does good stuff regularly. As a note of interest to fen who like

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slick fantasy, he had a tale called *The Magic Hoop* in last September's TODAY'S WOMAN, where it was mistakenly labeled stf. If you can get hold of a copy, I advise you to do so. You won't regret it.

Mr. Palmer! When are you going to switch over to using staples in OW? The covers come off very easily, and the March 1950 copy that I have is in two segments. At least use a stronger glue, or more of what you are using now.

Are you going to bring out an English edition of OW? If so, I'd like to make some suggestions for the first issue. On the top of the list is Russell's *Dear Devil,* quickly followed by Bradbury's *Way In The Middle Of The Air.* Also, *Seven Come A-Lovin'* by Craig Rog Phillips Browning, from your first issue. For good measure throw in Bixby's *And All For One* and van Vogt's *Enchanted Village.* With these, if the edition was put out by one of those who publish 64 page large sized zines, you would have a line-up of top material. An English reader, buying his first stf mag with this edition, would be sold on stf for life. There would probably be room for one more short, so I suggest *The Frownzly Florgels* by Frederic Brown.

I'd like to mention here one of the best fan clubs now in existence. Namely, the INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE-FICTION CORRESPONDENCE CLUB. At the present there are over a hundred members, headed by Lawrence Kiehlbach of Billings, Montana, now in his second year as president. There is a bi-monthly club zine called The Explorer, which contains material submitted by members and departments including a Trading Corner and a Kollektor's Korner to help fen with the same interests get in touch with each other.

The best part of it is that there are no dues, the only expenses being a subscription to The Explorer at the rate of 50c per annum. The price gives you values worth far more in the long run. Currently running are authors indices of the stfantasy mags for 1950. OW was in the Feb-March issue, along with PLANET STORIES. AMAZING and STARTLING were in the January issue.

I'll close with a plea that you go monthly, which will enable you to run serials of novels up to a hundred thousand words in length. I'd like to see you have Henry Kuttner revive his Gallagher series. I don't think he has done any of these since '48.

Lyons Falls, N. Y.

The list of Shaver pen-names was included in the June-July OW editorial, and the same issue contained the long-awaited Bloch story. We also have a Bloch story in this issue, as well as another that hasn't been scheduled as yet. At present, we're not considering an English edition of OW, but if we ever do, we'd have a hard time choosing a better line-up than the one you suggest. Hmm, you readers are really cracking down on us about this matter of staples. We are going to have to give the matter some careful consideration and either switch to staples or present you with some excellent reasons for not doing so.—Ed.

CHARLES ALLEN

I have just crawled out of bed at 3:00am to write this, my first letter to a magazine. I have been reading through about six of the various science-fiction and fantasy magazines for three hours and was spurred to this effort by someone's lack of appreciation of Hannes Bok. Most of my associates are theatrical,

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musicians or connected with the Arts in some way and tend toward pooh-poohing my interest in this sort of literature. All I have to do is wave a Bok illustration in front of them and if not always a convert, I at least find a change of heart. No other artist in science-fiction has ever had this effect with the exception of an occasional Finley. Bok holds his own, even on the cheapest paper. If my friends could only see his originals! I did have one once; I was so impressed by one of his pictures in Wierd Tales that I went to New York City from Indiana to see the original and he gave it to me.

I must be something of a snob. I read most of the magazines and like Astounding, Other Worlds and Galaxy best—one as well as the other; but Galaxy *feels* so much better that I would prefer to carry it around were it not for Bok in OW.

This doesn't sound like a typical "letter to the editor", but I've been reading fan departments since *The Snake Mother*, *The Blind Spot* and *The Moon Pool*, so I guess anything more would be redundant.

Of all the magazines on the market, I picked OTHER WORLDS as the first and only one to write to.

Are there any fan clubs in this territory?

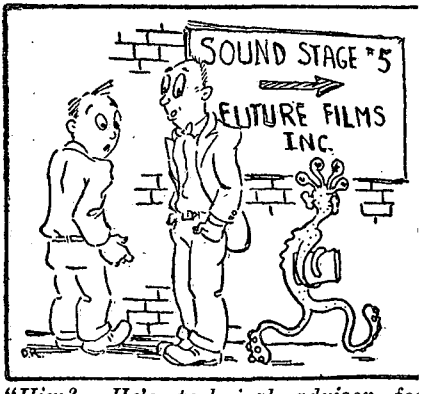
547 W. Wildwood
Ft. Wayne, Indiana

We've run across some "dyed-in-the-wool" Bok fans in our day, but it is now our firm belief that you take first place. And just to re-assure you, we have a couple of cover paintings by him on hand that we're going to use sometime in the future.
—Ed.

BOBBY WARNER

This is utterly astounding! Amazing! How do you do it. How long can you maintain what you're doing-Indefinitely? I sure hope so. Your latest ish of OW was the—*is* the—prime example which other leading stf mags should follow and use as their criterion. If they would, all stf mags would be top-notch, everybody would be reading all of them not just a select few. Therefore: exit, competition. Right now OW ranks second to none—with the possible exception of Madge. But then aren't OW and Madge sisters under the covers? To tell the truth, I don't know which one of them is the best. They're both tops in the field of science-fantasy. Won't you pulleeze come out monthly? One every six weeks isn't much, when you stop and consider the fact that a copy of OW can be read in two or three hours.

Now to review the June-July ish. The all-around summation is, of course, perfect — well, maybe just excellent. No stf mag is perfect. The stories were delicious, and a little better than usual. But you'll gradually make improvements in each forthcoming ish—I hope. As for the illos—better. With the possible exception of the one on page 78. It was inclined to be a little drab, I think. By the way, who DID do that illo?



"Him? He's technical advisor for their science-fiction films."

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I don't seem to recognize the style. the best illo was on pages 94 & 95, illustrating *Beyond The Darkness.* Next best was Bill Terry's pic for *The Tin You Love To Touch.*

Here goes the story rating.

In first place we have Bryne's novella, which I have previously mentioned. The only comment I have is a loud "MORE! ! !"

For second place I gladly give you Bob Bloch's yarn. (Also mentioned.) After reading Bob's creepy stories in Wierd Tales a few years back, I would have told anyone they were utterly insane had they even remotely hinted that Bloch could give me that many giggles. A true example of humorous fantasy.

Time Flaw comes in for a neat three-place landing. Superbly written, but the plot has been over-used. Expecially the part about "when velocity approaches the speed of light, time approaches zero." I never did agree with this—even if I did see it in aSF

The man-eating *Missionaries* take over fourth place with their god-machines. Anderson's one of my favorites, however, something happene here. Any other time he would hav taken first place. His story wa highly enjoyable, tho.

For fifth place there are two wi ners: *Mr. Yellow Jacket* and *Th Fledermaus Report,* both top-grad stuff. By the way, Ray, you gav us a good moral teaching in you tale. Have you turned philosophe on us? *F. Report*—plot stale, bu it gave me a few mundane he-haw

That's all. Tune in next issue t hear one alien's opinion, brough to you by Cosmoflakes.

Bessmay, Texa

In answer to your first questio yes, we hope to continue bringin out OW indefinitely, each issue be ter than the last. And, with th support and suggestions of our read ers, we think we'll succeed. The illus tration on page 78 was H. W. Mc Cauley, who also did the one o pages 94 and 95.—Ed.

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PERSONALS

David Ish, 914 Hammond Road Ridgwood, New Jersey wants to buy old back issues of Planet for 10c a copy. Would also like to correspond with fans and fanzine editors . . . *Wanted: Names and addresses of all fans in U. S. and Canada. Please tell something about yourself. Jerry Hunter, Fan File, 4612 E. New York St., Indianapolis, Indiana* . . . Will trade very good copy of April 1947 aSF (van Vogt's HOME OF THE GODS) for Galaxy SF Novel No. 1 and Feb. 1951 Marvel. Jack Cordes, 315 Catherine Street, Pekin, Illinois . . . *Jerry Hunter, 4612 E. New York St., Indianapolis, Indiana wants aSF World's Beyond, From Other Worlds, & Other Worlds. Will buy or trade books or mags for them* . . . I would like pre-'45 copies of FFM from someone who didn't tunnel into Fort Knox to get them. Dirce S. Archer, 1453 Barnsdale St., Pittsburgh 17, Pa . . . *Would like to hear from anyone who is interested in time travel or related subjects. Derham Giuliani, 73 Elk St., San Francisco 12, Calif* . . . Pvt. Cecil A. Sena, US 54-036-566, Camp Stewart, Georgia would like to hear from pen-pals, both girls and guys. Promises to answer all letters . . . *Gerry de la Ree, 277 Howland Avenue, River Edge, N. J. has a number of back issue stf and fantasy mags for sale. Send post card for list. Is also interested in buying up stf collections of books and mags. Special wants: any issues of Unknown, pre '44 aSF, pre-30 Weird books by Lovecraft and C. A. Smith* . . . Wanted: Early Arkham House books in fine to mint condition (Slan, The Eye and the Finger, Lost Worlds, Dark Odyssey, Marginalia, The Opener of the Way, Someone In The Dark, Out Of Space And Time, Beyond The Wall Of Sleep and The Outsider and Others). Owner must not demand my eye teeth. Have some books and mags to sell or trade on above. Glenn Lord, 702 E. Belmont, Pasadena, Texas . . . *Thomas Campana, 18 Jefferson Ave., Cresskill, New Jersey wants all back issues of Thrill Book, Unusual Stories, Tales of Magic and Mystery, Orchideengarten, Golden Fleece, Mystic Magazine, Magic Carpet and many other stf mags before '45, in good condition and for reasonable prices. Also QSO's with any local ham-fans around 7080, 7090 or 7105 kcs* . . . Henry Lewis, 1322 Garfield St., Eugene, Oregon has copies of Air Wonder, Science Wonder, Wonder, Thrilling Wonder, Astounding ('33 until its change to aSF), Amazing Fantastic Novels, etc. Will send price list on request. Also has copies of Strange Tales at $3.50 ea., Magic Carpet at $4.00 ea., Weird Tales from '23 to date at $3 ea. for those in the '20's, $2 for the '30's and $1 each for the rest. Has all copies of Unknown except one for $1 each . . . *Wanted: Edgar Rice Burroughs's "Lad and Lion", "Back to the Stone Age", Feb '42 AS, April '42 AS; Blue Book, April '40 and Jan '42; Adventures, June '40; March-May '39 Thrilling Adventures; all contain ERB stories. Also, "The Resurrection of Jimber Jaw", Argosy, Feb 20, '37 or '39. Charles Neutzel, 16452 Moorpark St. Encino, Calif.*

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(*Continued from inside front cover*) solve when Hitler came to power, in 1933. In 1934 he made plans for leaving Germany in an unobtrusive manner, going to England in January 1935 "for a vacation", but with an American visitor's visa in the back of his passport. From England he went to the United States as a visitor. He immigrated in February 1937 (and became a citizen on March 14, 1944). Attempts to interest American business in rocket research having failed, he lived as a free lance writer and became science editor of the New York newspaper PM, a job he held for almost the whole existence of that paper. In 1941 he wrote his first English book THE LUNGFISH AND THE UNICORN which was re-issued in an expanded version after the second World War. Later the same year he got married to PM's "Olga" (the beauty and exercise editor) and is father of two daughters, Sandra, born in 1944 and Xenia, born in 1947.

Between writing his column for PM, contributing to a large number of magazines and writing a few books, he started connections for active rocket work and after having become a citizen left for Atlanta and the short-lived Burke Aircraft Corporation to develop high-altitude research rockets. The work was cut short by the end of the war and the capture of the German group of rocket experts (many of them old German Rocket Society members). For a time he was research engineer for the Washington Institute of Technology in Washington, D. C. and temporarily Consultant to the Office of Technical Services of the Department of Commerce.

He returned to the New York area in 1950, where he now keeps very busy as a free lance writer, advisor to a television show and other work along such lines. He is well-known as lecturer to engineering and military societies.

The new German Rocket Society, reconstituted in Western Germany after the war, made him an Honorary Member. He is a Fellow of the British Interplanetary Society, a member of the American Rocket Society, and member of the Institute of the Aeronautical Sciences, the Society of American Military Engineers, the American Society for the Advancement of Science (A.A.A.S.) the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada and the P.E.N.

His most important publications in Germany were: *Die Moeglichkeit der Weltraumfahrt*, 1928, (The Possibility of Space Travel), *Konrad Gesner, Life and Work*, 1930, and *Synopsis of the History of Rockets.*

His books in English, all published by The Viking Press, are: BOMBS AND BOMBING; SHELLS AND SHOOTING; DAYS OF CREATION (now out of print); THE LUNGFISH, THE DODO, AND THE UNICORN (enlarged and partly re-written version of his first English book: THE CONQUEST OF SPACE (paintings by Chesley Bonestell, text by Willy Ley); DRAGONS IN AMBER. ROCKETS, MISSILES AND SPACE TRAVEL (to be published June 29, 1951) is a completely re-worked new version of his book ROCKETS which was published by the Viking Press for the first time in 1944. Except for the first three of the books mentioned, all exist in British Empire Editions, all have been translated into Italian, while other foreign language editions exist of some of them—THE CONQUEST OF SPACE has a Dutch and a Japanese edition, while ROCKETS had an Italian, a Spanish (South American) and a German edition.

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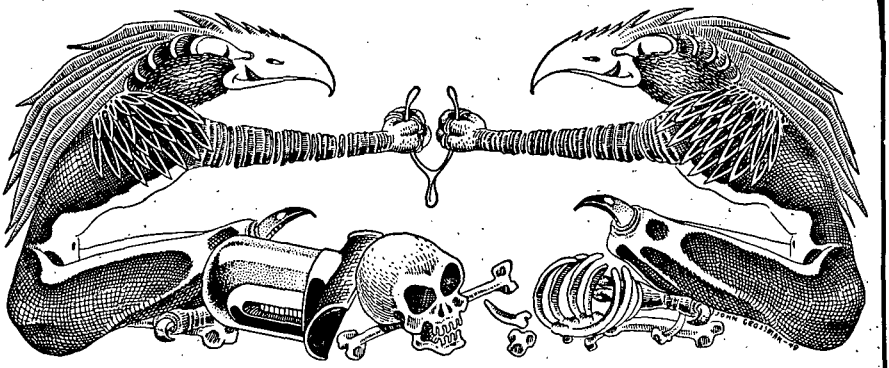

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